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M-28

By

E. F. Benson

Author of

"Sheaves," "A Reaping," "The Climber," etc.



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CHAPTER I

MRS. WINTHROP always gave a peremptory rap with her great loud knuckles on the door of any room in the house which she intended to enter, if such room was definitely allocated to anybody not herself. Thus she did not rap at the door of her own room because her intention of entering was already known to herself, and no further information need be given, nor did she rap at the doors of the dining-room or library or drawing-room, since those apartments were ground common to the inmates of the house, not allocated to any individual, and she had as much (probably more) right to enter them as anybody else. But she always rapped at the door of the nursery, and even at the door of the governess's bedroom when she made her swift descents (disconcerting and unexpected as those of some supreme potentate to regimental messes) on the sleeping-chambers of the house, to convince herself that the water in the bottle "smelled fresh," that towels had not been used for the mopping up of ink or other unsuitable spilth, and that no surreptitious accumulation of spent matches at the back of the grate made it her duty to entertain the suspicion that the unspeakable practice of reading in bed had been indulged in. Only one exception did Mrs. Winthrop make in her rule for knocking at doors : she knocked at the doors of bathrooms, though they were, in a sense, common ground, because both her husband and Frank were careless about locking them, and she was loath to

encounter life in all its nudity. But since she knocked at the door of so humble a person as her governess (and Mrs. Winthrop had a very distinct idea both of what people's places were and of the duty, not to say pleasure, of keeping them there), it followed *a fortiori* (though the phrase does not imply that she knocked any louder) that she gave token of her urgent presence this evening at the door of her husband's study.

Knocking at a door connotes in the usual interpretation of that ceremony a question, a request to know whether our presence on the other side of it is permitted, and in general the applicant waits for the information as to whether he may or may not enter. But the fact that Mrs. Winthrop differed from the ordinary run of mankind in her procedure at the doors of other people was characteristic of her hurrying personality. Her knock (again with the exception of bathrooms) did not ask any question whatever: it only enunciated the fact that she was going to make her entrance without delay. It did not say, "Are you ready, or shall I wait?" it said, "If you are not ready, I am, and I do not propose to wait."

Mrs. Winthrop had a mind, as has been already shown, that was always in a hurry, usually on the track of something, and often in a rage. Twenty-five years of living with a husband who was never in a hurry had tended only to accelerate, instead of retard, the speed with which she desired to "settle a thing once and for all" (a favourite phrase of hers), or to "probe things to the bottom," and the same quarter of a century in yoke with the most placid of mankind had only added pepper to a temper already piercingly aromatic. In trans-Atlantic phrase, she always "hustled," and there must have been some radium-like quality in her, for she burned unconsumed, and as far as could be seen never got an ounce

of fuel from those in the vicinity of her blazing. Her burning never infected others to an imitative activity : it only made them rather hot, and thus the more disposed towards quiescence. She talked rapidly, even in her sleep, and was never in the least tired.

In appearance she was birdlike, with large bright eyes, penetrating voice, and scudding movements, that took her swiftly across a room to close or open a window (which of the two was an immaterial consideration, so long as she made some change in existing conditions), or to pull down a blind or mend the fire with much clattering and metallic accompaniment. In such manœuvres she had two directing motives : the first, for she was kindly of intention, to add to the comfort of the occupant of the room (although she often diminished it thereby); the second, to busy herself fiercely in doing something that ought to have been done by servants. Thus, if it was a curtain that she drew to shut out the sun, both reasons inspired her. She made less glare in the room, which perhaps was a congenial change for the occupant; she also did what the footman should have done, which fed her capacity for rage. In other respects, physically, she was stout where she should have been spare, and spare where she had better have been well-furnished. Her face, that is to say, looked rather as if hens had trampled it, and it had subsequently been raked over; her hands seemed to rattle, and to have been granted more than the usual allowance of knuckles. But her dresses, of which, as of everything else, she was economical, required, from time to time, letting out.

So Mrs. Winthrop, at the hour of seven in the evening in this first week in September, knocked at the door of her husband's study and instantly entered. Her entrance at that hour, as she well knew, was irregular, since it was

a fairly polite fiction in the house that James went to his room after tea, and "did his work," at which he must be undisturbed, until the sounding of the dressing-bell. But below such surface knowledge lay the austere verity, also known to them both, that there was no reason in the world why he should not be disturbed at any hour. Indeed, at this sacred time, as both he and his wife very well knew (though the knowledge was politely kept below the surface, and only occasionally came to light, the sea, as it were, giving up its dead), sometimes he played Patience, sometimes he read the paper and dozed, sometimes, more frankly, he settled himself with his back to the light and slept. To-day he happened to be playing Patience, when the door sounded with knuckles.

"I hope I am not interrupting you, James," said Mrs. Winthrop, entering before the last echo of her hand had ceased, and hurrying across to the window to throw it open. Clearly it had not been opened since lunch, for the smell of James's after-lunch cigar was still perceptible to her eagerly inquiring nostrils. "I hope I am not interrupting you, but it was necessary that I should speak to you at once, and now that I look, I see you are only playing Patience."

It so happened that outside a brisk northerly breeze was setting landwards off the sea, and the up-flung window (for Mrs. Winthrop in her fury to get to it had left the door open) admitted it as through a funnel in concentrated force. In consequence all the cards of two packs which her husband had just set on the table, for the ultimate defeat of the difficult "Double Dot," rose into the air, in number one hundred and four, as at the Trial scene at the end of "Alice in Wonderland," and fluttered, swooped, and glided about the room like a company of amateurish aeroplanes. For a moment Mr. Winthrop held his hands over the table in a somewhat episcopal

attitude as if blessing them, in order to intercept their flight, but then, finding this was useless, removed his hands and placed them firmly over his ears in order to shut out the imminent detonation of the door, which, under the influence of the brisk wind, was swinging to with ever-increasing velocity.

The shock came to him muffled, and his wife appeared not to notice it. When it was over he removed his hands, and without remonstrance—indeed, with an air of placid interest—watched the hundred and four cards perch themselves about the room.

“And it is as well that I too have plenty of patience,” observed Mrs. Winthrop, with bitter wit, “or I should have been sorely tempted to box Frank’s ears. Before Jack and Polly too! Such an example for the children!”

Mr. Winthrop folded his plump hands over his plump waistcoat, smoothed down a rather exiguous crest of hair that had been erected by the wind, and set himself quietly to discover what his wife was talking about.

“Should you wish to render yourself intelligible to me, my dear,” he said, “you had better begin, not at the end of what you want to tell me about, but, if possible, at the beginning. Failing that, you might try the middle, and I will attempt to guess the earlier part.”

In this neat phrasing there might be traced some touch of acerbity with regard to his interrupted Patience. But Mr. Winthrop knew his wife would not notice it, for she was on a track. Nor did she.

“There was no middle,” said she, jerking up the window-blind with such suddenness that the tassel at the end of the cord flew high in the air by its own momentum and hit the ceiling. “It all happened in a flash, before I could even clear my throat to show them that I was sorting letters on the window-seat of my room, and I could not help hearing. If Frank was a year •

or two younger I should urge you to give him a good whipping."

"Frank," said Mr. Winthrop to himself, with the detached air of an independent investigator—"Frank has certainly committed some indiscretion on the lawn in front of your windows. And the other children were playing there."

"Though I remember perfectly well that my father gave Henry a whipping when he was eighteen, and Frank is but four years older. When a deed is for another's good, James, minor considerations ought not to deter us."

"It is impossible to call Frank a minor consideration, my dear, if I grasp your meaning correctly," said Mr. Winthrop. "He is a very strong young man, six feet high. Therefore the scene you suggest is outside my powers of imagination. I think we should get on more quickly if you proceeded, without further flights of fancy, to tell me what Frank has done."

Mrs. Winthrop held her mouth open during this speech to show she had not finished.

"As if I was not coming to that," she said, "when you interrupted me with the absurd suggestion that you were to give Frank a whipping, when all I said was that it was a pity he was not a few years younger, or that you had not any sense of his shameful behaviour."

Again Mr. Winthrop had to smooth down a crest of ruffled hair.

"If you will shut that window, Minnie," he said, "I shall not get so much blown away. And if without more argument you will tell me what this shameful behaviour has been, I shall stand a better chance of having some sense of it."

The sash crashed into its place.

"I have often seen him looking at her before," said Mrs. Winthrop, beginning, so to speak, chapters before

the beginning, " in a way that I did not like, and perhaps it was weak of me not to have spoken of it. And now, there they were, Miss Allenby playing with the other children, and Frank sitting on the railing in front of my window, which I have always asked him not to do."

" Is that it ?" asked her husband bewilderedly, stretching drowning fingers towards unsubstantial straws.

" How can you be so foolish ?—when Jack hit Miss Allenby's ball up the bank and across the gravel, where it rolled against the railings."

" They were playing at croquet," said Mr. Winthrop, making another discovery.

" And then, before I could clear my throat, as I say, or show them that I was sorting letters in the window, Frank said : ' I say, you're most awfully pretty, Miss Allenby.' Your son said that to my governess !"

" The young libertine !" said Mr. Winthrop. " And was that all, Minnie, or did he proceed ?"

" How can you ask ? Of course I gave a great cough, which rasped my throat dreadfully, and they saw me. Miss Allenby turned red, and Frank said ' O Lord ! ' "

Mr. Winthrop gave a little, noiseless laugh.

" I think that about expresses the situation, my dear," he remarked. " Even on reflection I cannot think of anything better that Frank could have said."

" I'm sure it was a providence that I was there, and that I was so prompt," said his wife, " else, for all I know, he might have asked for a kiss or something awful, for if ever there was a boy who was a flirt it is Frank. I'm sure I wish you had been firmer with him four years ago when he left school, and told him that he had got to be a clergyman like his grandfather, whether he liked it or not, if that is the sort of behaviour he learns in the army."

"I think he would have made a curious clergyman, my dear," said Mr. Winthrop. "Is that all?"

"I should think that was sufficient for one evening's work," said she.

"Quite so. Now, do you want me to do what I think best, or do you want to tell me what must be done, and then make me do it?"

"I should if I knew what to do," said she.

"Then I assume that you do not know what to do. I, on the other hand, know perfectly well. I shall tell Frank exactly what I think of it all."

"But what do you think of it all, James? I cannot trust you."

"In that case manage the whole affair yourself, my dear. I have not the slightest desire to interfere. I only venture to prophesy, however, that if you attempt to talk either to Frank or Miss Allenby, you will make a silly of yourself."

"Really, James——"

"Yes, really. You see, you have never been a young man. I have. Probably you will begin by telling Frank that he has done a wicked thing——"

"And so he has."

"No, he has not, my dear. He has done a slightly stupid one. Miss Allenby is remarkably pretty. His mistake lay in telling her so. It is a mistake that most nice young fellows fall into. I'm sure heaps of nice fellows told you that you were pretty before I did, and that you didn't think the worse of them."

Mr. Winthrop, in spite of, or perhaps partly owing to his placidity, was a tactician of no mean order. On this occasion his tactics were flawless, for his wife turned a swift flashlight into the caves of memory, and had a glimpse, it must be supposed, of treasures of this sort. In any case, she gave up this particular point, and put another.

"But I was not a governess," she said, as if governesses, by the nature of their calling, forfeited all right to be pretty.

He laughed, audibly this time, since he did not wish his amusement to be private.

"You are very clever, my dear," he said. "You are guessing just what I shall tell Frank. Not that I shall remind him that you were not a governess, but that Miss Allenby is."

"And that I should have to dismiss her, if anything of the sort occurred again," said Mrs. Winthrop.

"Your second guess is not so good as your first. If you dismissed Miss Allenby I should go too. No one has ever been able to keep the imps in order before, neither you, nor I, nor any of the frightened-looking young ladies who have tried their hands at it."

A crash of glass sounded from the garden, followed by a child's shrill voice.

"Oh, Miss Allenby, right through the middle! Please don't tell papa; he said he would stop my allowance next time."

Mr. Winthrop gave a placid little cough.

"There is no need to tell papa," he remarked. "Papa knows. That was Jack. So now, my dear, I think everything is settled, and if you would kindly ring the bell——"

"You will send for Frank, and then Jack," said his wife, with a generous peal.

"I shall do nothing of the sort. Pray do not guess any more, for you are not guessing well now. I shall merely ask whoever answers it to pick up one hundred and four cards. Then I shall do my Patience."

"And I will find out what Jack has broken," said his wife, hurrying from the room.

Mrs. Winthrop's methods with bells were well known in the house, and in a space of time, incredibly short to any

who were not in training, so to speak, to answer bells before they finished ringing, a short-breathing footman glided into the room, and looked round, incredulous of not finding his mistress there.

“Oh, William, the cards, please,” said his master. “There should be a hundred and four.”

He watched the recovery of the packs without impatience, thinking over the conversation he had held with his wife. He was perfectly aware how trying his own imperturbability was to that hurricane-minded lady, and the reflection afforded him moments of gentle amusement. For it was obvious, even to a casual observer, and therefore a commonplace to him, that with her all “running and jumping,” as he phrased it to himself, she never managed affairs her way, when his own idea of their proper administration differed from hers. Her running and jumping dissipated the energy of her will-power; she never allowed it to fill her cistern, so to speak, because the taps of the cistern were continually dribbling it ineffectually out in other directions. He, on the other hand, was accustomed to remain quiet, without expenditure of energy, till energy was needed. Then, no less quietly, he expended it, without, so to speak, blowing on the surface of it to raise there a mimic storm. Again his wife was accustomed to spring to action, even before the grounds for action were in her possession; James Winthrop, on the other hand, sat still so long that it might be hastily conjectured that he was not going to act at all. But about the day after to-morrow, if his action might reasonably be expected to-day, or the week after next, if his action might reasonably be expected at the end of this week, he did something, which generally answered its purpose. And if at the end of a considerable time he still did nothing whatever, it was usually the case that his inaction had served a purpose too. And to-day,

as he watched William collect the strayed cards, he wondered, although he had told his wife that he would tell Frank exactly what he thought of this amorous escapade, whether the impulse of that inflammable young man would not be best held in check by silence. Frank would quite certainly take for granted that his mother had told his father about it, and complete silence on his father's part might be more effective than speech. It might even lead Frank, who was exuberantly confidential to his father, to speak first. And the cards by this period of his meditation, being safely and entirely harvested by William, Mr. Winthrop without effort dismissed the subject from his mind. His final reflection was that it was not a bad thing that Frank had to rejoin his regiment in a week's time.

Mr. Winthrop, in his nature and manner of life, was, as may be already conjectured, a salutary protestant against the scurrying existence typical of the new century. He had spent thirty of the years known as the best years of a man's life in the City, quietly accumulating a moderate fortune, and at the age of fifty had severed his connection with business altogether, and had bought himself this charming house on the Norfolk coast, where he spent the months from late spring to early autumn, removing punctually every year when the setting in of northerly and easterly winds caused him, as he phrased it, "to creak," and took the odious, but health-giving, waters of Harrogate for a fortnight, before settling into his house at the county town of Bracebridge for the winter, braced by the East Coast, and internally corrected by draughts of sulphuretted hydrogen. He was singularly contented with life, and the natural desire of man for comedy to supply salt to antics was abundantly supplied by the contemplation of the excited existence of

his wife and family. In the case of his wife something that might easily inspire quiet amusement in a mind naturally humorous has already been seen, and it may be added with regard to their children that Nature had interpreted the law of heredity by which she is bound in a singularly ingenious way. Broadly speaking, she had endowed them with their mother's activity and energy, and their father's content, and those qualities, when implanted in young and healthy bodies whose time was largely passed out of doors in the bracing air of the East Coast, may be guessed to be productive of incidents that would drive dulness from the door. Frank, by virtue of his years and profession, was not frequently at home, but at present their father had the two younger children, aged eight and nine, always with him. From their earliest years they had been the imps, and there was at present no sign that they would ever be otherwise. But somehow or other Miss Allenby, as has been mentioned, could hold them in check. It was certain they did not fear her, and therefore it must be supposed they loved her. She had been with them three months now, and with the exception of one agitating afternoon, when Polly apparently had tried to drown Jack, and nearly succeeded, nothing really exciting had happened. And on that fell occasion Miss Allenby had been up in town for the day, so that it must not properly be counted. Nor did the tale of Miss Allenby's usefulness end with her management of the imps. Mrs. Winthrop, as might be expected from a person of so strenuous a disposition, was deeply and incessantly engaged in schemes for promoting and suppressing, and preventing and encouraging, and combined in her person the salient features of a suffragette, an anti-vivisectionist and vaccinationist, a vegetarian, and a total abstainer. She tore children away from unnatural parents, and forced them back to

support aged ones. She gave them happy fortnights in the country, and industrious ones in town, and, in a word, interfered, though with benignant purpose behind her rage, as much as possible in the affairs of other people. Under those circumstances, provided only that her own plate was filled with vegetables and her glass with pure spring water, she had little time in which to attend to the domestic affairs of the house, and, indeed, as a house-keeper, her activities were really confined to making periodic raids into bedrooms to see whether the sumptuary laws had not been broken with regard to the proper use of towels, and the improper use of candles, in order to read in bed, and into kitchen or pantry to catch the cook perpetrating some act of waste, or the butler some act of whisky. In a word, though the rôle of occasional house-policeman may be ceded her, that of housekeeper must be withheld, and it was on Miss Allenby that such duties had by degrees dropped until, to Mr. Winthrop's much-increased content, they had been in all but name definitely vested in her, to the point that Mrs. Winthrop herself would, except when the fever of police-patrol was on her, make complaints on the score of cooking or service to the governess.

Mr. Winthrop felt that after his wife's incursion, he might reasonably expect a quiet time till the hour for dressing arrived, but he had barely dealt out his hundred and four cards again when a tap, markedly not his wife's, came at his door, and he gave a resigned permission of entry.

Miss Allenby appeared.

"Am I interrupting you?" she asked.

"Yes, my dear Miss Allenby, you have already done so."

The girl laughed. When she laughed the corners of

her eyes wrinkled softly upwards, so that but the thinnest line of blue appeared between the half-closed lids. She held her blue tam-o'-shanter cap in her hand, leaving her bright brown hair uncovered.

"I am so sorry," she said. "Shall I cease to interrupt you?"

"Certainly not. Sit down. Is it about the window Jack has broken?"

"How did you know?" she asked.

"Because I heard Jack very shrilly ask you not to tell me. I imagine you have come to thwart him."

"I—I hadn't quite made up my mind," she said.

"Then what had you come to tell me if it was not that?"

Miss Allenby looked away a minute, and then back at him.

"I had come to tell you a window was broken, the big pane in the conservatory-door, I am afraid, but——"

"The witness must answer," remarked Mr. Winthrop.

"Well, I hadn't quite made up my mind whether to say that Jack broke it, or that I did. You see, it was really my fault. I let them play rounders at that end of the lawn. It was practically certain a window would be broken. So I think really that it is fair that I should pay for it instead of Jack."

Mr. Winthrop's attention suddenly wandered, and he removed the queen of spades from the middle of the third row. Then he brought his mind back again.

"Yes, I think that is fair," he said placidly. "If you will lead the imps into mischief, I don't think it is their fault. But I'm sorry you were thinking of telling me a fib, and saying you broke it. You shall pay the bill when I send it in to you."

"Hadn't I better do it now?"

The girl looked at him again, and then laughed.

"Oh, I see," she said. "You were so grave that you took me in. But it was stupid of me to let them play there."

"This is all very tedious," said Mr. Winthrop. "Haven't the imps done anything more original than that all day?"

"No; it has been rather an off-day with them. I expect it's owing to the heat."

"Are we going to dine out of doors to-night?" asked he.

"No; I thought the wind might be rather chilly. Besides, Lord Tenby and his mother are coming, and I know she has got a cold."

"So do I," said Mr. Winthrop. "I heard her sneezing two gardens away."

Miss Allenby laughed again.

"Sound carries so," she said.

"If loud enough. A great deal depends on that. Are you coming down to dinner, Miss Allenby?"

"I wasn't going to, unless I was wanted," she said.

"Mrs. Winthrop did not say anything about it; I don't usually if there are people here."

"Why is that? It sounds exclusive. Are you ashamed of us before other people?"

The girl laughed again; laughter clearly rose easily to her lips.

"No; but governesses don't come down to dinner if there are people," she said. "Indeed, in most houses they don't come down at all."

Mr. Winthrop sighed.

"I'm sure it must be much nicer having supper by yourself in the schoolroom," he said. "You can read a book, which makes everything taste delicious. But please come down to-night. You like Lady Tenby, I know."

"I adore Lady Tenby," said the girl. "I must go now and write out the menu cards."

Mr. Winthrop did not at once go back to his Patience when the girl left him. The evening sun shining in at the window poured a blaze of orange light into the room, and he rose to pull down the blind, and, without forethought, to open the window. Then, with a slight sense of martyrdom, he settled down to a terribly abbreviated spell of "Double Dot."

The house which Mr. Winthrop had acquired in which to pass, not his declining years alone, but those of the vigorous fifties before the decline began, was one of a colony of spacious and convenient residences planted down within the last ten years or so round the fishing hamlet of High Beach. It stood not more than a hundred yards from the extreme edge of the tall sandy cliffs that fringe the shore, and the garden ran to within a few feet of the edge, along which passed a narrow path, which the depredations of the sea and the slippings of the soft cliffs occasionally made narrower, so that from time to time his garden fence had to be set a yard or two back, to allow the right of way outside it to be preserved. In a winter storm, indeed, now a few years ago, not only had a long section of this path fallen into the beach below, but a young hedge of buckthorn which he had planted to shelter his garden from the northerly winds had been uprooted with it. But that had been the last loss of territory, and to-day various of the buckthorn shrubs, undeterred by their tumble, flourished in the steep face of the cliff, finding there with poppies and tufts of goldenrod a root-hold sufficiently secure. But within this precarious fence the garden flourished bravely. A path led down the centre of it, communicating with the public footpath outside ; to the right lay the croquet-lawn and tennis-lawn ; to the left, hedges, here of buckthorn, here of sweet-briar, formed screens for the flowers to prosper

under their shelter. Here, when the winds were still, the air, still brisk from the sea, was heavy with odour of heliotrope and stocks ; fuchsias burgeoned into bushes, and Chinese asters flushed purple. Elsewhere a wooden pergola was festooned with rambler roses, and the clustered pods of laburnum testified to the golden glory which had covered it in May. Closer to the house a greater formality was observed, and geometric beds outlined in dwarf hedges of box formed a cat-cradle of little gravelled paths, in the centre of which stood an old Italian fountain. On the other side of the main path above the croquet-lawn a conservatory (now with broken-paned door) masked the angle of the house, and in front of the dining-room windows was a deep, brick-floored veranda, where it was customary to lunch and dine if the day was hot. Just beyond were the windows of Mrs. Winthrop's sitting-room, and below them the wooden railing on which Frank had thoughtlessly sat and infelicitously spoken. On the other side of the house, away from the sea, an irregular triangle of lawn, well-sheltered by shrubberies, ran between the main road and the short drive up to the house.

The original village of High Beach, a few dozen roofs of fishermen's houses, lay eastwards. On the other side of it stood four or five more bungalow-looking residences, all lately built, and beyond a great barrack of an hotel on the sea-nibbled edge of the cliff. Westwards again, the coast here facing due north, stood some half-dozen more of houses similar to Mr. Winthrop's, and the whole settlement came to an abrupt end in the golf-links that stretched for a mile along the top of the cliffs towards Raythorpe. Steep sandy paths scrambled down the cliff-side at intervals, and led to the beach, which was intersected by wooden groins, designed to put a stop to the encroachments of the sea, and here was the happy play-

ground where the imps, among swarms of other children, were in paradise all day long. A line of white bathing-tents fringed the top of the beach, which stretched gently shelving to the water's edge, and, given that there was no prohibition against getting thoroughly wet and sandy, there was nothing that children might not do, and few things that they did not. Seaweed and obliquely-moving crabs could be collected, sand-castles of amazing design, no two alike, but all with a moat (that essential feature in maritime building), could be erected, cricket could be played under any rules and with any implements, provided only that the person who hit the ball into the sea should wade in and fetch it out; shining and transparent pebbles, which lost a little of their lustre when dry, but which could be licked again and resume their effulgence, incidentally giving a romantic taste of salt to the polishing tongue, could be hoarded, and bits of amber or agate occasionally rewarded the diligent searcher. Then for those with no cricket or scientific ardour, even if the formal bathe was over, there was paddling to cool sunburned legs, and the only black moments were those when it was necessary to resume some sort of foot-covering and trudge up the sandy paths again. Even then, dinner or tea awaited the returned reveller, and there was always to-morrow to look forward to, while Sunday only came once a week as usual.

Sunday, indeed, in this unfallen paradise of children on the beach, occurred but very seldom, so long were the intervening six days; so short, when Sunday came, the restriction it imposed. True, the golden hours of the morning were chiefly spent in garb that felt stiff and starchy after the freedom of the week-days, and this had to be taken care of and not plastered with whatever on sea or land was handiest, but even in church, to the mind of the imps, there were objects and people and

things sung or said that were not wholly devoid of interest. For instance, only last Sunday Jack had condescended to attend to the *Venite*, and his condescension had been speedily rewarded, for there came a lovely verse that said, "The sea is His, and He made it," though it was anticlimax after that to allude to the preparation of the dry land, which manifestly was of less interest. So, instead of prancing on ahead to see if he could get his shoes and stockings off before Polly and Miss Allenby got down to the beach after church, he had thrust a warm, damp hand into Miss Allenby's, and asked extremely pertinent questions.

"Does all the sea belong to God ?"

"Every bit," said Miss Allenby.

"And doesn't He mind my kicking it about and bathing in it ?"

"No, He likes it, as long as you are good," said Miss Allenby.

"How awfully kind of Him!"

Jack paused a moment, considering the nature of this hospitality.

"Miss Allenby," he said, "if He likes me to go into the sea and I don't want the crabs there, why shouldn't I stamp on them ?"

"Because it's a garden-party. He has asked them just as much as He has asked you. It's rude to stamp on people at garden-parties."

"Jack's always rude," remarked Polly scornfully.

"All right. Who tried to drown me ? Do shut up ! But, Miss Allenby, when you swam against a jelly-fish you called it a nasty beast. Wasn't it asked to the garden-party same as the crabs ?"

Miss Allenby had to think.

"Yes, but I forgot," she said. "It was my mistake, and it was rude of me. But you needn't talk to every-

body at garden-parties, and we'll none of us talk to the jelly-fish if he comes again. He's an awful swell, Jack, like the Prince of Wales, and you mustn't speak to him unless he says he wishes to be introduced."

"Oh well, I don't want to be introduced. Oh, there's the sea, Miss Allenby ; there will be time to bathe before lunch, won't there ?"

This evening the dressing-bell sounded while the girl was still employed on the menu cards, and having finished them she went to the dining-room to bestow them on the table and give orders for the extra place to be laid for her. While thus employed, Mrs. Winthrop hurricaned into the room, and having received explanations, hurricaned forth again to tell her husband how dreadfully thoughtless his arrangement was, since Frank would have to take Miss Allenby into dinner. So once again her imperious announcement sounded on his door.

Within, miraculous intervention had made "Double Dot" give evidence of "going out" on the second deal, which he had just completed, a thing that happened perhaps once in a year, and, placid though Mr. Winthrop was, this radiant possibility thrilled him. Then the door flew wide, the blind of the window which he had opened rustled and cracked as the wind drove it horizontally into the room, and for the second time that evening the two entire packs rose in skimming flights.

"Frank will have to take her in," began Mrs. Winthrop. But she got no farther, for her husband interrupted : "Minnie, your entrances are extraordinarily ill-timed !" he exclaimed. "It was coming out. Ring the bell, please."

CHAPTER II

It was quite true that Lady Tenby had a remarkably heavy cold, but that did not in the least impair her boisterous gaiety. She naturally talked in a loud, rather hoarse voice, which, in consequence of her ailment, was hoarser than ever, and was interspersed with passages of strangled whisperings. She carried with her a little bag with relays of handkerchiefs all soaked in eucalyptus, and was in the highest spirits. In contrast to her, everyone else, even Mrs. Winthrop, appeared rather faded and feeble, and even Frank, who, as his father had said, was a strong young man six feet high, puny and inclined to fragility.

“Yes, of course I bathed this morning,” she was saying, laughing. “And it made my cold much worse. But I am sorry you dined indoors instead of out for that reason, because I never take the slightest notice of a cold, except to load myself with eucalyptus for the sake of other people. Either your cold gets worse and worse until you die of it, or else it gets better and you live. Mine is going to get better: colds don’t kill off ugly people like me. Besides, I had my hand told the other day, and I’m going to live till ninety-one—so pleasant for everybody. Not so many years, after all, for an old woman, but I shall have half a dozen more birthdays yet.”

It would perhaps be uncharitable to accuse so jovial and straightforward a woman of having a planned or thought-out attitude towards social intercourse, for she so clearly

seemed to say just what came into her mind, but it is a fact that she habitually made game of herself, her age, her appearance, her disposition, so that it might occur to the more analytical that she forestalled even tacit criticism by her own exaggerated severity. Strong she was, and called herself tough ; ugly she was not, for her big-featured face, though plain, was full of the charm of vitality, while with regard to her age, which she often stated quite openly and truthfully, it was not half a dozen birthdays that intervened between it and ninety-one, but a round forty.

"I tried to make my mother send an excuse, and not come out this evening," said Lord Tenby to Mrs. Winthrop, "but it wasn't the slightest use."

His mother heard this.

"Not in the least, dear Ted," she said, with a laugh. "You should have learned by this time that the only way of managing me is to let me have my way. Then you can lead me like a lamb by a silken thread, or even without a thread at all. Otherwise, a steel hawser and a donkey-engine are required."

She turned to Mrs. Winthrop again.

"And all morning up to my bathe I gardened," she said. "Real gardening, you know, not standing on the path in high-heeled shoes and pointing with the end of a parasol to where you want the gardener to put something. No ; a trowel, and a spade, and thick boots, and big gloves. And I scythed fifty yards of the meadow where Ted practises mashie-shots all the time he isn't playing golf, and found half a dozen balls, which he lost again before lunch, where I hadn't scythed. Never mind ; I shall find them for him again to-morrow, and sell them back again at a shilling each. And after my scything I ran down to the beach, dirty and black and dripping and streaming, like an old nigger-woman, and had a heavenly swim.

Miss Allenby was there with the imps, and I took Polly on my back, and swam out with her till she thought we should have to charter a steamer to get home. Wasn't it so, Miss Allenby ?"

" You are indefatigable," remarked Mrs. Winthrop.

" Oh, there's no rest for the wicked ! Then, after lunch, I had a round of golf with Ted, and went to the Registry Office at Raythorpe to get a new cook. My cook was found yesterday afternoon, sleeping, with her head on a leg of mutton and grasping an empty whisky bottle. The kitchen-maid and I cooked lunch together, and Ted says it was delicious. If this wicked Budget passes, I shall advertise for a place as general servant and gardener, but there must be children in the family. The only thing I have never forgiven Ted is his growing up, and I shall forgive him that when he marries and makes me a grandmother."

Mrs. Winthrop, meantime, had pinned Lord Tenby down to listen to an angry account of her system of happy fortnights by the sea for town children. He was a rather stout young man of about twenty-five, of big make, like his mother, and with an expression of amiability on his rather heavy-looking face, that nearly verged on the fatuous. As a matter of fact, he was not fatuous in the least, and his amiable appearance was fully endorsed by his character. Like so large a majority of mankind, he was almost entirely deficient in imagination, and was practically without passions of any kind, either good or evil. He was fond of food, which he habitually ate in rather large quantities ; and three large meals a day, with two rounds of golf and a little practice with a mashie at odd times, served to fill the hours in a manner which to him was thoroughly satisfactory. His day being thus quite filled up, he had seldom time to read the paper till

after dinner. While he did this, his mother usually played the piano with a loud sketchy touch, which generally made him go to sleep. When she stopped he woke up, and played piquet with her, if they had no guests with them, till bedtime. He always went to bed rather early, in order to be in good form at golf next day. But his invincible good temper and amiability made him well liked, and there was something distinctly attractive in his simplicity and contentment. He had no expensive tastes of any sort, which was lucky, since he would not have had the means to gratify them. His conversational powers were never very great, but just now that also was as well, and Mrs. Winthrop's fierce monologue could flow on uninterrupted.

"I board the children with the fishermen," she was saying, "and pay them seven shillings a week for each child, which gives them a fair profit. The food, of course, is of the simplest."

"I should think it must be," said he, interested in the economy of this. "You couldn't get much of a bilious attack on a shilling a day."

"My design is not to induce bilious attacks," said Mrs. Winthrop, scattering grated cheese over her heaped-up plate of lentils. "Brown bread and beans and cheese, like what I am eating, forms a fully sustaining meal even for adults!"

"Couldn't do two rounds a day on beans," said Lord Tenby. "At least, I should be sorry to try. It would take twenty yards off my drive."

"I assure you not. The utmost bodily vigour can be sustained on fleshless foods. I myself never touch meat of any sort or kind, and of course no alcohol. On seven shillings a week the fishermen's wives make quite a decent little profit. Of course, I have the right to inspect their meals and their quarters at any moment, day

or night, and I insist on the children being out at least seven hours in the day, whether they like it or not. It is for their good, as well as their pleasure, of course, that I organize these holidays for them. No child is allowed to mope indoors."

"Poor little beggars!" said Lord Tenby with a vague sense of pity. "Not even if they've got colds?"

"Being out of doors is the best remedy in the world," said Mrs. Winthrop. "I myself never have a cold. I attribute it chiefly to my abstention from flesh-foods. And I am never tired."

Frank, meantime, had found himself conversationally paired with Miss Allenby. He had discreetly retired to the smoking-room after the episode outside his mother's windows, and during dinner, had several times found her eye fixed coldly on him, in a manner somewhat disconcerting, if he spoke to the girl. But silence on the whole was more embarrassing than the eye. And he found himself getting gradually more absorbed in the one and oblivious to the other. Also, he told himself that he had said a remarkably true thing that afternoon when he told her she was pretty.

She was prettier than ever to-night, dressed in some white soft stuff which to his masculine mind came under the general head of muslin. Her arms were bare to the elbow, and round her wrists and at the base of her neck there ran a line, distinct almost to hardness, where the dress-covered skin of her body began and the wholesome brown of face, neck, and hands ended. Complexion-mongers might have held up hands of dismay at the discoloration; to him it only spoke of an outdoor girl, one who scorned the pink-and-white, or more probably never thought of it even in scorn, and loved the sun and the brisk winds, and the day-long employments on the beach. His own left hand that broke his bread and lay

close to her right hand when she held her glass was scarcely browner, and both were smooth-skinned and long-fingered—hands of youth and vigour.

“Imps gone to bed, Miss Allenby?” he asked.

“I hope so. Have you any reason to suppose not?”

“Nothing solid. Jack told me that if you came down to dinner he would come too. But I expect he forgot and went to sleep. Aren’t you glad when they go to sleep?”

She laughed.

“Oh no!” she said with emphasis. “I feel it’s such a waste of time for them. They do enjoy themselves so tremendously when they are awake. Of course they are often frightfully naughty, but I think I like naughty children best. It seems more natural. When a child appears to be thoughtful and good, I think I rather distrust it.”

“Good news for the naughty! When ought they to turn good?”

She gave a little sigh.

“Oh, Mr. Frank, why do you ask me questions I can’t answer? I should say the age varied. They turn good, I suppose, when they are unable to be naughty any longer. It’s frightfully difficult to be naughty when you’re quite old, I should think.”

“Because nobody has a right to say you mustn’t do whatever you choose?” he asked.

“No, because you’re old, and tired, and worn out. It’s a sign of great high spirits to be naughty. And I do love high spirits.”

“Got them yourself?”

She looked at him, the eye-wrinkling smile quivering on her face.

“Yes; but that isn’t a confession of naughtiness. Oh, I can answer your first question better now. When children grow up they ought to be naughty inside just the

same, but not let it come out. It's like a dog. It feels just as naughty as it did when it was a puppy, only it doesn't behave so."

"Knowing it doesn't pay."

"Yes, and that it is a good thing to avoid rows." Suddenly the same thought crossed the minds of both.

"It's best to behave decently," they both said together, and went through the ritual of the crooked finger.

This roused Lady Tenby's intervention.

"I had the crooked finger with Ted this morning," she said, "and he could think of nothing except that he should put his mashie-shots dead. What a contented spirit! He wanted nothing more; at least, he didn't know he wanted anything more. So few people know what they want. I do;" and she gave a great jovial, hoarse laugh.

"And can you tell us ?" asked Mr. Winthrop.

"Easily. Everything nice that can be thought of. I gave my wish to him this morning. A nice girl, with mints of money, and without delay. Ted, we are talking about you. Don't listen, dear !"

For a party of six, Bridge with two out was indicated, and as Miss Allenby was supposed by Mrs. Winthrop not to play Bridge, since it did not seem likely that a governess should, only one had to absent himself from the table. This, on the first rubber, was Lord Tenby, and the two strolled out on to the veranda outside the drawing-room while the rubber was in progress, leaving Mrs. Winthrop fiercely explaining to her husband, as she had done fifty times before, what his mode of procedure must be if no trumps were doubled on her left. She did not often permit herself the relaxation of Bridge, but when she did played it as if she thought that vehemence would turn the least-valued cards of her hand into trumps or aces. This

it did not usually succeed in doing, but sometimes at the end of a deal she brought out an unsuspected thirteenth card, and extemporized an explanation as to how throughout she would have parted with anything sooner than it.

Outside, the wind that had twice wrought havoc with Mr. Winthrop's "Double Dot" that evening had completely died down, and the sky, bare of clouds, was a field of thick-sown star-dust. In the south-east a moon "large and low" traced a copper-coloured track over a still sea, and the garden-beds and croquet-lawn were black in shadow of the poplar-hedge. Warm though it was, the briskness of the sea pierced an air that would have been languid inland, and gave it an underlying freshness. Except for the copper-coloured track of reflected moonlight the sea lay black, and straight in the middle of that luminous path was a fishing-boat, a defined blot on the burnished way. To right and left lay others, a shade blacker than the water, distant, silent, romantic.

"Seems nice and quiet, doesn't it, Miss Allenby," said Lord Tenby. "And it looks not more than an iron-shot to hit the old moon. But fellows who know say it's twenty-nine thousand miles off. Funny things are figures. They only seem to confuse one."

Directness of any sort appealed to Miss Allenby, and even these elementary reflections seemed to her rather attractive.

"I suppose you always measure things in scale of shots at golf," she said. "It is so good to have a scale."

The moment she had said it the sentence sounded satirical. But it was not meant as such, nor was it thus interpreted.

"Well, yes," said he, "you have to measure distance somehow, and most people do it by the scale they know best. There's that fountain now: that's a long putt. You are a short putt from me. Couldn't fail to hole it."

"I expect you are tremendously good at golf," she remarked.

"Oh, well, I hold my own at a handicap of six. But to think there are men on the other side of scratch! Why, it's sickening!"

"And do you like golf better than anything else there is?" she asked.

"Lord, no! But what else are you to do after lunch? But now it's after dinner. I like cutting out of the Bridge-table, and looking at the moon. Fisher-boats out there too, and men in them. I like wondering what they are all thinking about. Good thing we don't know. Probably they are thinking about nothing but herrings. But when you see the sails against the moonlight, you can't help stuffing them with all sorts of romantic affairs. Or do you think that is rot?"

Miss Allenby turned from the full face that she had directed seawards, which was half-face to him, and gave him the full face, luminous-eyed. He was not Lord Tenby, or anybody else to her at the moment; he was simply a tentative endorsement of herself.

"I don't think I care about anything except what a truly sensible person would call rot," she said. "I like all the things that are imaginary. I like your imaginary iron-shot to the moon, and the imaginary thoughts of fisher-folk. The only tiresome things are the real things, lunch and dinner."

"It depends on the dinner," said he.

The spell that was weaving both him and her into the summer night was cut off short at this, for it requires but a misplaced word, an uncaptured hint, to break off a magic so faint and elusive. Yet already, in spite of the obviousness of the man, his measuring of the distance of the moon by an iron-shot, there had been a touch of veiled romance, as remote it might be, as the quiver of

sheet-lightning in a distant cloud, in his appreciation of the little fishing-fleet, with its silent, wide-eyed men, watching. And to break up the "twilight touch" more effectually there came on the moment a hoarse jolly laugh from inside.

"And four aces all in my own hand," said Lady Tenby. "I don't go no trumps on nothing, like you, Mr. Frank. But give me four aces and a sprinkling of kings, and I call it every time. That is the rubber, isn't it? Where is Ted? He must cut in."

But though the phrase about dinner had cut off the weaving of magic for the girl, the interlacement of the gossamer threads still went on for him—the spell of the wonderful September night, with its high-swung harvest-moon, the sex-spell of this tall, beautiful girl standing bareheaded by him. True, the counter-incantation was only a summons to the card-table, nothing very potent to a mind with even the average allowance of fire and the stuff of which dreams are made, but Lord Tenby had distinctly been stinted by Nature in this regard, and it was something of a surprise to himself that the prospect of a rubber did not allure him more.

"Upon my word, it seems a waste of time to go and get excited over pasteboard by candlelight," he said, "when one might walk about in the moonlight, and look at the sea. But I suppose I had better go in. Aren't you going to play?"

"Oh no, I never do," she said.

Frank had cut out of the table, as she saw from outside, but he was sufficiently wise, under the raking fire of his mother's eye, not to join Miss Allenby, and the girl went down the steps, and along the gravel walk that led through the garden to the edge of the cliff. Though the air was so clear, and the stars burned jewel-like, the moonlight lacked the precision of day, and the outlines of

trees and cliff were blurred and soft, and the texture of them furred and velvety. Out to sea the fishing-fleet had drifted farther away, and from horizon to shore the wavering moon-path shone uninterruptedly. From the dew-drenched grass at the side of the path came the smell of sweet, damp earth, and from the flower-beds the sweeter fragrance of stocks and heliotrope. Below on the beach the tide was at its lowest, and lines and patches of wet, shining pebbles gleamed in the dim grey sand. Only the faintest whisper of tiny wavelets came to the ear as the thin line of broken water stretched itself like a white thread along the edge of the sea, and vanished again. A couple of miles to the left the top of the Raythorpe Lighthouse looked over the ridge of the golf-links, and long pencils of light swept slowly over the sea then across the down straight to where she stood, and glided by past the house, and across the wooded uplands to the left. All night they would walk their tireless round ; all night would the patient watchers in the high tower minister to their burning.

Again the spell of the huge quiet night began to weave its magic in the girl's heart, driving her thoughts inward, showing her, as Nature always does to those by whom its appeal is heard, not itself only, but herself. There was the sea, and the ragged, nibbled edges of sand-cliff, the benediction of moonlight and the gold net of a myriad stars, the same in themselves, but looked upon by thousands of different eyes, and meaning a thousand different things to the beholders, inducing a thousand different moods. To the fisher the moon was just the candle that gave light to him as he set his nets, the sea the store-house from which he took his daily bread. To the mariner the stars were compass and chronometer ; to the astronomer, the moon but a congregation of extinct

volcanoes ; to the weary, the night but a space for rest and recuperation. But to her the night, and the stillness, and the stars made a light by which she began to look at herself, to examine, to wonder, and construct.

Happy ? Yes, as far as she knew she was very happy, and not less because she wanted so much. She was eager and alert, full of curiosity, ready to give a welcome to all experience, brave and self-reliant as to what the future might bring. In the past she had had need enough for this quality of fearlessness, for when, a year ago, her mother had died suddenly, she had found herself, not yet nineteen, alone in the world, as far as relations went, with fifty pounds a year to face existence with. One other relation, indeed, she thought to be still living, a brother of her father's, who, on her father's death, some eight years before, had wished to adopt her, and take her away from England to the United States, where he drove a tremendous trade in all that pertained to pigs' bristles. He was willing to provide liberally, also, for her mother, should such an arrangement be made, but stipulated that the girl was to live entirely with him, and that his sister-in-law was not to do so at all, for he professed himself quite unable to stand what he called "her d'Arcy ways." This, interpreted, meant that Mrs. Allenby was a lady, and he was what he called, with perfect truth, a plain man. He intimated, moreover, that, should his offer be refused, neither Mrs. Allenby nor her daughter need expect to hear anything more of him, and Violet had received no acknowledgment from him of her letter, in which she told him of her mother's death. She had not expected anything else, and it was with unabated courage that she had set about making her own living. Her education had been excellent ; she had already taught small girls in a high-school before her mother's death, and it was without difficulty that she secured a six months' engagement, and

subsequently this permanent home at Mrs. Winthrop's. Such was the materialistic aspect of her history.

But it was not to this public side of herself, so to speak, that the spell of the summer night drove her, nor, as her thoughts floated out towards the future, did the question as to how long she was likely to be needed as governess here occupy her long. Jack was eight, Polly nine ; it might easily be that she would be here seven or eight years yet, provided she was satisfactory. That was a long time ; Jack would be fifteen, she would be twenty-seven, Frank would be thirty, a captain. How old they would all be !

Violet Allenby had sat herself on the wooden stile at the edge of the cliffs, and was looking gravely enough with wide-open eyes at the sea, when suddenly those eyes narrowed up, and she gave a little involuntary spurt of laughter at the memory that had come to her of that extraordinarily loud and complicated species of cough that had made itself heard through Mrs. Winthrop's window in token of her presence that afternoon. Embarrassing though it was for the moment, she felt inclined to be grateful for it, since the embarrassment of having to reply or be silent to Frank's very straightforward statement would have been more embarrassing still. She felt that it was extremely foolish of him to have said that, and yet, if she was quite honest with herself, she knew that she had not the slightest objection to his having done so. She was delighted to be told that she was pretty, though she knew that perfectly well already, so that what her pleasure really consisted in was the fact that it was he who had told her so. For she was excellent friends with Frank ; he helped her in the management of the imps ; he made things pleasant with his high spirits and welcoming of the ordinary commonplace affairs of life ; his companionship was charming, and without doubt he was good to look upon. But further than that her thought

did not take her ; her feeling for him was untinged with romance, else, after his outspoken remark, his presence must have wrought in her something of that sweet and strange bewilderment, part shrinking, part attractive, which is the banner which heralds the approach of love. As yet no such decoration drew her expectant eyes ; as far as she was concerned, she could have met him, even if he had come out here alone under the tingling stars, and austere and empty spaces of land and sea, without the loss of one jot of the ease and naturalness that had hitherto marked their companionship. Yet, though she knew it not, she must have already taken an unconscious step towards the banner which was still invisible, for she could tell herself that it was not there. Up till to-day no thought of its possible existence had entered her mind. Now she could say that romance was absent ; hitherto its absence had been unnoticed.

It was without an effort that she detached her thoughts from him, and it was without purpose that it settled down on to the two guests who had dined with them that night. The mother detained her first, for Lady Tenby, with her untiring vitality, her tremendous enthusiasm for the affairs of the moment, whether it was the bath, or the gardening, or the cooking of an amateur lunch that occupied her, was the object of the girl's enthusiastic appreciation. How different was the quality of that good-natured, sympathetic vitality from the enraged and waspish unrest of Mrs. Winthrop ! One gathered honey, not to store it, so to speak, but to give it to the first wayfarer, the other buzzed about stinging people for their good, though not (so the girl made haste to add, lest there should be any question about that) in order to gratify any desire of stinging. Something within herself thrilled and responded to all Lady Tenby's expression of herself, her scornful refusal to be depressed by untoward circum-

stances (witness, in an infinitesimal way, her treatment of her cold), her delight in doing, her delight and sympathy in the doings of others. She was so keenly and so multifariously in touch with the world ; if you swam out with her it was she who wanted to swim farther, and had never felt so invigorated ; if you built a sand-castle for the imps, it was she who wanted to dig the moat deeper yet, so that the enchantment of being surrounded by the rising tide might be longer and more perilously enjoyed.

“ If you swam out with her ”—the phrase of her own thought enticed her back again. If any adventure was on hand, any excursion into the unknown, she felt sure that if Lady Tenby approved of and accompanied the swimming out, it would take place with good luck in its favour, and the helping hand in case of cross-currents. She felt she would adventure anything, so long as Lady Tenby shared the venture, so efficient was her scorn of all that was possibly unfavourable, so keen her welcome of all that made for success. Girl-like, here was her first love, not love for a man, but love for a wiser and elder member of her own sex. The touch of the romantic, which was missing when she thought of Frank, was here predominant. She scarcely knew Lady Tenby, yet romance made rose-coloured the grey. In her relation to Frank there was no grey, but, on the other hand, there was no colouring of rose. It was a cheerful sunlit morning, and the sea beckoned.

A long sigh was the greeting of her thoughts to Lady Tenby. Frank had merited no more than the merriment of a laugh. And her thought passed from mother to son, the son of the iron-shot that would reach the moon, of the long putt that would reach the Italian fountain. With regard to him there was also, as in the case of Frank, no romance. But he was interesting ; her thought lingered longer over him than over the other. He had felt a vague inherent poetry in the sail of the fishing-boat

that cut the path of the moonlight. Frank would certainly have seen none ; he might have wondered if the fishers would have good luck that night, but he would have gone no farther than that. Yet, yet . . . how good he was to look at, and to play with ; he was eager and alive almost to the scale of Lady Tenby, and how light and lithe were his movements ! And how sincere had been his ill-chosen remark about her prettiness ! It had come from his mouth like a soap-bubble—symmetrical and iridescent.

Violet deliberately got off the stile, as her mind then came back in a circle to the point from which it had started a few minutes ago, and whistled home the vagrancy of her thoughts. She could not accuse herself of indulging in tender reflections on either of these unconscious young men, but reflections of any sort were out of place. She had nothing to do with either of them, she, the governess of the imps, and they moving in orbits so far outside and beyond any path which her own star could possibly take. And yet, had she known it, those three stars, those lives far flung into the myriad-peopled, whirling skies of the world, were destined to rush together, to blaze, in strange, unguessed conjunction, and burn red-flamed with the fire of love, and bitterness, and longing.

The rubber was just over when the girl got back to the house, and while Mrs. Winthrop was imprisoning her winnings, which amounted to no less than four shillings and sixpence, in a purse made of close-linked steel fetters, Lady Tenby, winner of the same sum, had already promised her garden three new rose-trees as the fruits of her cleverness in holding so constant a galaxy of trumps and honours. Thereafter, having put her feet into large goloshes, and tied up her head in a shabby, but garish, red shawl, in which, so she loudly affirmed, she presented a spectacle terrifying enough to stop the moon shining,

she tramped away with her son, full of plans for renewed bathing and gardening, and, if necessary, cooking next day.

Mr. Winthrop usually finished the day with an attempt in one of the shorter and more hopeful Patiences, and to-night Frank lingered with him, showing spasmodic interest in his play. This was unusual, for how anybody should care to play Patience was one of the things unintelligible to him. But to-night, though his attention was not of the fixed sort, he sat for periods opposite his father, congratulating him as the piles of cards in suits grew, and occasionally making not very felicitous suggestions. Mr. Winthrop had more than a suspicion what lay behind this, and by a couple of deft pieces of cheating, while Frank was not looking, soon declared that Lady Appleby (she being the species in question) was a nice, straightforward woman, and gathered up his packs. This brought Frank back from the window, and he sat down again with one long leg crooked over the arm of his chair, and the expression of one who is screwing himself up for an emergency not entirely to his liking. All this Mr. Winthrop acutely observed, and was quite willing that Frank should be uncomfortable. At last the resolve mounted to a sufficiently high pressure.

"Father, may I speak to you about something?" he said.

"About anything," said Mr. Winthrop.

"Well, I made a fool of myself to-day. At least, I think I did."

"It may happen to anyone, my dear Frank. It has happened even to me before now. Doubtless it will again. What form did your folly take?"

"Well, it was after tea, and Miss Allenby was playing with the children. And it suddenly struck me how extraordinarily pretty she was. So I told her. Mother must

have heard, for on the moment"—Frank stifled the tremble of a laugh—"on the moment there came from her window, opposite which I was sitting, the most extraordinarily loud cough."

His father nodded.

"I know all about it," he said, "but I thought it good for you to go through the discomfort of telling me. Your mother told me immediately afterwards. Now, my dear Frank, what you told Miss Allenby was perfectly true ; I am not quarrelling with that in the least, but it was stupid of you to say that, and not quite like a gentleman."

This had not struck Frank.

"How's that ?" he asked.

"Because it isn't fair. You forgot that she was your mother's governess. She is a lady, and placed in a position where she has to serve us. It's quite a different thing if you go to a girl you meet staying in a house or at a dance, and tell her she is pretty. Then if she is disposed you can have a little flirtation, which is quite right and proper. But you can't flirt with the governess in your mother's house. It puts her in an impossible position. Miss Allenby is charming, and we all like talking to her, and making her feel at home here. But if you go telling her she is pretty, it will only make her dreadfully uncomfortable. And it isn't polite or chivalrous to make young ladies uncomfortable."

Frank flushed a little under these plain, sensible statements.

"What had I better do ?" he said. "Should I apologize ?"

"Certainly not. That will embarrass her again. Behave perfectly naturally to her, as you have done hitherto. It isn't as if you were in love with her, or she with you."

"I know. It just slipped out."

"It is a way things have. I'm glad you told me. Fathers like being treated by their sons as friends, and I promise you you'll always find me a good friend. Don't

worry about it any more, and don't do it again. Bed-time, isn't it?"

Frank stood up, and held out his hand to his father.

"Thanks awfully, father," he said. "Shall I ring?"

They went upstairs, and Frank, leaving a trail of clothes behind him on his bedroom floor, was ready to get into bed almost the moment that he had arrived there. But instead he crossed the room again and sat down on the sill of his open window, letting the cool night air tingle on his bare shoulders, and the wind, which had begun to prowl about in the bushes below, ruffle his hair. He had assented without doubt or delay to his father's assertion that he was not in love with Miss Allenby, and yet the moment almost that he had given his assent he began to wonder whether it was true. He was of a charmingly inflammable disposition, and his vows and offerings in the shrine of feminine perfection were as sincere as they were frequent. But he was distinctly of the pilgrim nature, and wandered eagerly yet light-heartedly from altar to altar, burning quantities of incense at each, quite convinced for the moment that here at last was his ultimate goal, a thing which proved never to be the case. There was really no reason to suppose that this visit to the altar of Miss Allenby was more momentous than that wonderful visit he had paid to quite a different altar only a month before, and which, as usual, was to mark the end of his wanderings. But it had done nothing of the kind, and here was he looking out into the moonlight, and throwing on incense at the next altar in handfuls.

Frank was as far as possible removed from the particularly odious class of young man who thinks that those favoured girls on whom he casts his sovereign eye are

instantly captured by his charm. He was, in these cases, far too busily intent on his own worship of the goddess to hazard any conjecture as to what the goddess thought of her worshipper, far less that the rôles were exchanged, and that he was the worshipped. His own devotions were sufficient employment to him, though, of course, it was gratifying if the goddess seemed to be listening to him. But in the case of Miss Allenby there was really nothing to show whether she had listened or not, her behaviour to him at dinner being exactly that which it had always been—easy, friendly, and perfectly unembarrassed. So in any case she did not seem to be offended with him. Somehow that was a source of extreme gratification to him ; he felt that, in the light in which his father had put things to him, he had had a lucky escape, and, further, that the thought of the girl being distant and cold with him was a prospect quite surprisingly dismal to contemplate.

He had been in England now for a couple of months, and next week, on the expiration of his leave, he would have to go back to Cairo, where his regiment was quartered. And then, with extreme distinctness, he became aware that he did not want to go back in the least : he would much sooner stop and—well, to be honest, remain at this last altar. Till to-day, though he had been well aware of the charm and beauty of the girl, it had not come home to him ; their intercourse had been that of playfellows, without any confusing touch of sex coming in to mar or make the pleasant familiarity of their relationship. But to-day the word which, as he had truthfully said, had “slipped out” was becoming like some escaped creature, remarkably active and free. It pounced on him, making him feel its strength : he was powerless in its clutch. It was in vain that he recalled his devotion before other altars, for it seemed that until now he had

been only mumbling empty forms of words before them, taking part in a ritual that to him had no real significance. Miss Allenby mattered so much more, and he ladled out the incense with ungrudging hand.

And then he pulled himself together. Whether he was in love or not, he had to behave like a sane being. His leave, as has been said, came to an end in a week's time ; in a fortnight from now he would assuredly be back in Cairo, with all the multitudinous interests and diversions of his profession round him. Without being in any sense a prudent or calculating youth, it was clear to him beyond need of argument or discussion that even if he was in love with her—a proposition by no means demonstrated—anything serious, any love-making with definite end in view, was out of the question. Boys of twenty-two in the Service were not regarded as marriageable people : he might as well have gone to the Head at Eton, and asked to be allowed to leave, since he proposed to get married. That was all perfectly clear ; moreover, there was not the smallest reason for supposing that Miss Allenby thought of him otherwise than as an agreeable—he flattered himself to that extent—an agreeable and active member of her circle, one who would run after the imps for her, hale them back if their obstreperous legs had carried them far into the offing, one who took part in bathes, and games, and all the interests of their outdoor life. Clearly that was a very pleasant and obvious rôle for him to play during the few days that remained to him here : clearly it would be insanity to try to substitute any other for it.

Frank never wasted time in trying to refute unalterable conclusions. He made two steps of it to bed, and commanded sleep to pay its accustomed immediate visit to him. But sleep did not wholly obey his orders. It came near to him, hovered above him with heavy

eyelids and drooped mouth, dulling his senses at times, at times flashing him wide awake, as with a bull's-eye lantern suddenly kindled in his mind. And the pictures it painted for him in the darkness in these periods of dulled consciousness were not wholly conducive to repose. A face that he knew hung dimly before him, the hair bright and brown, the eyes half-closed in a smile that wrinkled up their lower lids.

CHAPTER III

THE great hour, the festival of purification for sandy and bedaubed children, was approaching. Some were more fortunate than the imps to whom total immersion in the North Sea (or German Ocean) was forbidden by edict of Mrs. Winthrop until the hour of noon. At twelve precisely they might enter the ocean, but not before. But since no prohibition had been laid down about the assumption of bathing-dress, they habitually wriggled themselves into the tight little sacks, cut off at shoulder and hip, without which a baby in arms was forbidden to bathe by the edict of the Town Council of Raythorpe, and waited for the twelve strokes of noon from the stable-clock of their house on the cliffs above.

Miss Allenby always bathed with them, self-sacrificingly delaying her dip till they might come in too, for it was clearly not bearable that she should begin to bathe while the imps were compelled to look on with passion and envy. Mrs. Winthrop often joined the party, and swam angrily and swiftly for a hundred strokes out to sea, returned, and dressed with amazing swiftness, and went home to prevent or promote something before lunch. Her husband, when the weather was, as to-day, quite unusually warm, floated aimlessly about for ten minutes or so, while Frank, heedless of envy or pain on the part of the imps, led an amphibious existence most of the morning.

Paddling was permitted at any hour, and Jack this morning had been sophistical on the subject. He main-

tained that he had only paddled, but he had quite distinctly paddled as far up as his neck ; and, since he could not swim, he was unable to differentiate between bathing and paddling—things which, as Miss Allenby told him with scorn, were totally distinct, and only a very foolish child would confuse them.

“ Paddling comes to the knees,” she said, “ and bathing everywhere else. You will have to sit on the beach till you have counted three hundred after twelve o’clock has struck. You are punishing me, too, because I shall sit here and see you don’t go in while I’m not looking.”

This produced the desired effect.

“ You needn’t,” he said. “ I give you my word and honour I won’t.”

Miss Allenby decided not to relent.

“ That’s no use,” she said. “ You’ve already told me that you only paddled and didn’t bathe. You might tell me next that you didn’t know which the sea was. It’s ‘ Medes and Persians.’ ”

That was a phrase of Power. Miss Allenby never said it was Medes and Persians unless it really was, and when it really was there was no use in arguing any further.

The heat of this crisis had passed, however, and by half-past eleven (Jack having been naughty about eleven) peace was restored again, and Jack was resigned.

“ So now that bother’s over !” said Polly, who had sat with her nose in the air during this discussion, because she had been good, and couldn’t imagine what made Jack want to be naughty. “ Now, Miss Allenby, dear, do tell us a story to make the time go quicker. I hate half-past eleven till twelve.”

“ I hate twelve till three hundred after,” said Jack.

“ Well, it was your fault for being such a silly. Do begin, Miss Allenby !”

“ Once upon a time,” began Miss Allenby.

" You've told us that before," said Jack.

" Shut up," said Polly. " They have to begin with that, else they aren't stories. Hullo, Frank ! Miss Allenby's going to tell us a story, and you may listen."

Frank had come up, dripping, from the sea, after an half-hour's swim.

" You're all wet," said Jack.

" No, I'm not. May I listen, Miss Allenby ?"

" In course," said Polly.

Miss Allenby also was in bathing-dress, with a dressing-gown of bath-towel over it. From below it came out rosy-toed feet, things adorable.

" I promise not to interrupt," he said, " and to smash any imp who does."

" Shows what you know about it," said Jack. " We may interrupt if we don't understand."

" But it will be frightfully foolish," said the girl.

" I don't suppose it will be more than usual," said Polly. " Oh, do begin, Miss Allenby ! And may it be about your uncle ? She's got an uncle who's made of pure gold !"

" And when he tries to bathe he sinks," said Jack, kicking violently in the sand ; " like me, except when Miss Allenby holds me up, or Lady Tenby. Oh, do begin, Miss Allenby—from the beginning !"

" Once upon a time," said Miss Allenby very quickly, " there was a man made of pure gold, and when I was born, they made him my uncle."

" Why ?" asked Jack.

" Because there wasn't anybody else clever enough to be his niece. It is harder to be a niece than anything else."

Frank lay down on the sand, supporting his chin in his hands, and looked at Miss Allenby with deep attention.

" May I ask questions, too ?" he said.

" It depends. At least, you may always ask them.

No man has ever succeeded in being a niece, however hard he tried."

"I expect I could if I really wanted to," said Jack.

"No, you couldn't," said Polly. "What was your uncle's name, Miss Allenby ?"

"Popacatapetl—Uncle Popacatapetl."

"That wasn't his name last time."

"No ; he changes it every Monday morning, so that the Mint shouldn't know who he is, and where he is. If they knew, they would send for him, and cut him up into sovereigns."

"I like this part," said Polly.

"I don't ; it's all new," said Jack. "I like it best when I know what's coming. Go on, Miss Allenby."

"P——" said the girl.

"Oh, please, then !"

"Well, Uncle Popacatapetl lived in England till he had called himself all the names in the dictionary, even the bad ones, in order that the Mint-man shouldn't catch him. But when he began again at 'A,' and said he was Uncle Abraham, of course they knew he was the gold man, and they sent a motor-car and two balloons, and asked him to come to tea, because they were his first-cousins, and they had to remove him once. So he never suspected that they were the Mint, and got into the motor-car. And the two balloons harnessed themselves above it, and went backwards as hard as they could go, while the motor-car went forwards."

"Why ?" asked Frank.

"Because the Mint wanted to cut him into sovereigns, silly," said Jack.

"No ; but why did the motor-car go forwards and the balloons backwards ?"

"Because—because the motor-car was one of the new ones, that could not go less than a hundred miles an

hour, which was above speed-limit. So the balloons that were fastened to it were also new ones, which went ninety miles an hour in the opposite direction, and so the whole affair, with Uncle Popacatapetl sitting in the middle and singing part-songs, moved towards the Mint at the pace of ten miles an hour, which is as much as is proper in crowded traffic. Do you see?"

"Yes. It was very clever of them to think of balloons, though," said Frank. "I don't see what put them on to balloons."

"Because Uncle Popacatapetl was so heavy, as he was pure gold," screeched Polly, "and they were so light. "You are a silly, Frank. Wasn't that it, Miss Allenby."

"Not at all. It's you who are a silly. They had balloons simply because there wasn't anything else there. They had coined everything else into sovereigns, including the tables and chairs. They weren't bright enough to use by day, because anyone could see they were only made of wood. So they sold them as night-sovereigns, rather more cheaply than the others. Also, they didn't make a right sort of chink, so they sold small gramophones with them, which made chinking noises all the time."

"I don't know where we've got to," said Frank in a despairing voice.

"Nor did Uncle Popacatapetl. As a matter of fact, they had just got to the middle of Charing Cross Bridge, because he was hiding in a slum the other side, under the name of Uncle Ahasuerus, when the Mint sent for him, saying they were his first cousins. And just as they got to the middle of Charing Cross Bridge——"

"They met with a train at full speed," said Jack, slapping the sand with an exultant spade.

"No ; they met a train going at empty speed."

"What's that ?"

"Well, full speed is going as fast as it can, so empty

speed is going as slow as it can. It was going only one Flemish ell in an hour."

"That was slow," said Polly appreciatively.

"Yes; it had just been given the first prize for slow-
ness—"

"What was the prize?" asked Frank.

"A golden snail."

"We're not getting on a bit this morning," said Jack in an injured voice.

"That was because it was the empty-speed express that they met. If the empty-speed express came by now, everything would go three times as slow, and it would not be twelve o'clock till after tea-time. So that delayed them a good deal, while at the Mint, as you may guess, there was a tremendous lot of bustle and preparation. The head Mint man was to stand at the door, with a cousin-smile on his face, and as soon as the balloon and Uncle Popacatapetl appeared he was to present him with the freedom of the City of London, and read an illuminated address, and say 'O yez!' three times. By that time everything would be ready inside, the axes for chopping off Uncle Popacatapetl's arms and legs, the search parties to see if he had anything contraband about him."

"What's that?" began Jack.

"Oh, never mind!" said Polly. "It doesn't matter. Yes, Miss Allenby."

"Contraband ought really to be contraband-box. You were quite right to ask, Jack. Everything you can't put in a band-box is contraband. And they lit a huge furnace to melt him down in, and borrowed all the Lord Mayor's saucepans to put the bits in, and laid all the axes and saws and choppers in a row, and wheeled up the new bathing-machine, so that he could undress comfortably in his bathing-machine, and then come out

to be chopped up, and put into the Lord Mayor's sauce-pans. And they sharpened all the axes till they shone like cold boiled beef, and heaped up the fire till all the thermometers for two miles round burst into fragments, and everybody's dinner was cooked without having to light any fire."

"Wasn't it rather hot for the head Mint man at the door?"

"Yes, as hot as roast potatoes. But he had a pail of poisoned strawberry ice by him, which he was going to give to Uncle Popacatapetl to refresh him after his journey, and he kept putting spoonfuls on the top of his head, and putting his hat very tightly on directly afterwards to shut out the heat."

At the moment the stable clock began to strike, a thing Miss Allenby was rather glad of, as her inventive powers were beginning to grow thin.

"And just then twelve o'clock struck, so they had *pax* for a little, in order to go to bathe."

"But I mayn't bathe till I've counted three hundred," said Jack. "Polly and Frank can go, and oh, Miss Allenby, do tell me some more while I count!"

"I'll wait, too, if you like, Jack," said Polly.

"As if I cared! Yes, Miss Allenby. One, two, three, four, five, six——"

"Well, there they were waiting, and meantime the balloons and motor-car and Uncle Popacatapetl, and the empty-speed express, were all jumbled up on Charing Cross Bridge. And just then there came the most awful blast of wind from the Houses of Parliament, and they all toppled over into the Thames. Uncle Popacatapetl was just singing 'Come, live with Me and be my Love,' in demi-semi-semi-demi minims, which is very difficult, and then he struck the water with the biggest splash ever made, and went straight to the bottom.

"Of course, then he thought this must be some sort of plot, so he held his breath with both hands, and ran along the bottom of the river until it reached the sea. Then he turned sharp to the right, and ran into the Atlantic cable, which goes down the Channel and across the Atlantic. Luckily a telegram was coming by at the moment, so he caught hold of it by its waterproof——"

"I never saw a telegram in a waterproof," said Jack.

"Because you've never seen one at the bottom of the sea, or even when it rains. And that's why they always get to you dry. So Uncle Popacatapetl caught hold of its waterproof, and as they went along, of course, he read the telegram, which was about the fire at the Mint. So then he saw all the plot quite clearly, and knew what an escape he had had. And before he could count three hundred he came out in the middle of the Telegraph Office at New York. And that was all that happened that morning."

"Oh, and I haven't begun counting yet!" cried Jack.

"Uncle Popacatapetl counted for you. Come along, imps."

Each of the imps instantly grabbed a hand of Miss Allenby's, and she let her dressing-gown slip off her shoulders.

"Now we'll all run," she said, "and hold our breath, like Uncle Popacatapetl, until the water comes right over our heads."

"Frank, too," shrieked Polly. "Catch hold, Frank. Oh, it is nice!"

A breathless scamper across the sands, shrieks from the imps as they crossed a streak of sharp pebbles, and a gorgeous encounter of foam and splashing. The rush had carried them all a little out of Jack's depth, and mad wavings of his hand showed sub-aqueous distress. Polly was only just mouth-high above the water, but she

laughed so much over this that gallons of sea-water poured in, and the expedition moved a few yards landwards to give first aid.

“It was lovely,” said Jack, as soon as he could speak.
“May we do it again?”

“No; swimming lessons first,” said Miss Allenby.
“Come on, Polly; then you, Jack.”

“Oh, I’ll take Jack,” said Frank.

“Will you? Thank you so much. You put your hand underneath his chest, and then, if he doesn’t kick out high and wide, you take it away, so that he sinks.”

“I never sink,” said Polly, laying herself out on the top of the water. “I only stop in the same place.”

“Anyone can do that,” said Jack. “I moved then. I felt—”

Frank’s hand was swiftly withdrawn, and the rest of the sentence lost.

After some five minutes of wallowing and kicking, the first lesson was over.

“Now, imps, go and run hard along the shore,” said Miss Allenby, “as far as the second breakwater. And when I come back from my swim, you shall have another lesson.”

Frank was standing waist-high, glistening with the water. Already the sun had dried his hair back into closer curls.

“May I come and swim out with you, too?” he said.
“The fishermen say there are some rather strong currents.”

The girl laughed.

“Yes, do,” she said; “and I’ll rescue you if you get caught by one. Is that it?”

“That will do quite well,” said he.

So out they went into the world of crystalline blue, swimming hard for a spell, each with secret emulation to

gain on the other, without seeming to race, now on the breast-stroke, now on the side, with arms alternately lifted out of the water, and coming back through it with swishing strokes, making the water rise in froth and stream over their heads, as the impetus thrust them forwards. There was but little between them in point of speed—both swam admirably ; but Frank was a shade the more skilful of the two in the management of breathing, so that, when at the end he called out, “Now, one spurt, Miss Allenby,” and porpoised away with burrowing head and high flung arms, the girl laughed and gave in. That brought him to a stop, and he turned.

“Ripping,” he said—“oh, ripping ! See how tiny the people on the beach look. We’ve come a long way out. I say, you can swim, Miss Allenby ! You’re not like Uncle Popacatapetl.”

“The story isn’t usually quite as inane as that,” she said, paddling slowly on. “I usually bring in some moral lesson. The imps invariably detect and resent it. But to-day I couldn’t think of one.”

“Do you make it all up ?” asked Frank. “How’s it done ?”

“Yes. I have got a sort of mythical uncle, you know. But otherwise I just open my mouth, and see what gets said.”

“Nothing would get said if I tried,” said he.

“Oh yes, it would, if you knew the imps despised you if you couldn’t tell them stories. Besides, there’s a lot in practise. As long as no idea creeps in, it’s all right.”

“But there were lots of ideas,” said Frank, giving a great lunge out, and getting level with her. (There was an adorable little hollow at the base of her neck, just where the collar-bones started, and he wanted to look at it.) “I loved the idea of letting him undress in a bathing-machine before they cut him up. Oh, Miss Allenby, I don’t know if you want to know, but there’s

a bit of hair come out of your—your oilskin, is it?—and it's trailing in the water."

Violet stopped swimming and trod water.

"Thanks so much. Oh, you boys are so much luckier than us. I wish I had short hair, so that it didn't matter whether it got wet or not."

Some remark of an obviously suitable nature, such as he would, without pause, have addressed to a dance partner, was on the tip of Frank's tongue. Then he remembered his father's remark of the evening before, and left it unspoken. But he almost repented of having told Miss Allenby about the escaped hair at all—that long escaped stream of tawny gold.

Miss Allenby looked appreciatively round on the empty shining waters. Little foot-high waves crested here and there with wisps of dazzling whiteness, danced landwards, for they had swam out against the tide, which had begun to flow, and the untarnished turquoise of the sky was reflected a shade darker on the sea. The yellow of the sand cliffs gleamed golden, and on their tops stretched the undulations of emerald turf. But the land and the affairs of it seemed remote and insignificant; the buoyant freshness and saltiness of the sea, with its eternal motion and youth, was all that was really of consequence.

"I suppose I ought to swim back," she said, "but with the flow of the tide we shall be there in a couple of minutes. What was that stroke you used just now, before we turned? You simply ran away from me."

Frank came level again.

"Hand over hand," he said, "and you give a sort of jump as you kick out. Look!"

One brown arm shot out and over his head, then the other. The rest of him was somewhere in that triangle of churned water.

"And you breathe just whenever you happen to be able?" she asked.

"Yes, hereabouts. Someone's putting out in a boat. I think it's my mother, isn't it?"

There could be no mistake about it. The boat was being swiftly propelled towards them. In the stern sat Mrs. Winthrop, bedecked for purification. Her long thin arms were bare, but discreet black stockings clothed her lower extremities.

"It is hardly safe to swim out so far without a boat, Miss Allenby," she observed, in a tone so chilly that the temperature of the water seemed to be affected, "so I put out in a boat to be near you. When you have finished swimming, I will have my bathe. I have heaps of time. Keep close to the lady," she added to the boatman.

It was therefore not altogether wonderful that some slight sense of restraint settled down on the swimming party, who made steadily for the shore in dead silence. Arrived there, Mrs. Winthrop stepped majestically into the shallow water; she looked somewhat critically at the girl's tall, slim figure as she came on to the shining sands.

"I recommend stockings," she said, "if you are going to swim much with gentlemen. They are equally convenient to swim in, and you will find they preserve you from sunburn. It is on those grounds I recommend them. I shall now take my dip."

The imps always had dinner with their elders, while the latter had lunch, and sat one on each side of Miss Allenby, who made occasional suggestions on such questions as the greater convenience of a spoon in chasing and capturing elusive substances like blanc-mange over a knife and fork, which were the hunting implements carefully selected to-day by Jack.

"But it's more exciting when you do catch it, Miss Allenby," he suggested.

"Yes, for the tablecloth," said she severely, as a piece slid noiselessly off his plate, like an otter taking water. Jack substituted the proposed tools, and was silent until his plate was absolutely empty.

"When I grow up," he said, "I shall marry William."

William, an intelligent young footman, was getting accustomed to this sort of thing, and removed Jack's plate without a tremor.

"You said you were going to marry Mrs. Inglis yesterday," said Polly.

"That was because I was hungry, and I'm not hungry now. And I dare say I can cook for myself, and most nice things are raw."

"Well, if you are not hungry any more, you can go away," said Miss Allenby.

"I think I shall be hungry again," said Jack, after thought.

A preventive and promoting post had just arrived for Mrs. Winthrop, and she was absorbed in typewritten communications.

"What is a flirt, Miss Allenby?" asked Polly. "Mamma said that to Frank——"

"Polly, get down and say your grace," said Mrs. Winthrop, becoming suddenly conscious of the situation.

Polly's instinct of obedience prompted her to stand up and fold her hands together. But she was thinking about the flirt, and began the Apostles' Creed instead, in the high flute-like voice in which she gave thanks for the food.

"I believe in Pontius Pilate," said Jack, brilliantly joining in.

"Amen," said Mrs. Winthrop very loud, to bring this undesired recital to a close; "and now you and Jack can go and lie down for half an hour."

"I'm hungry again," said Jack.

"Well, then, save it up for tea," suggested Miss Allenby.

"But what am I to do with it till then? Mayn't I have some more mutton?"

"Jack's a greedy!" said Polly. "He will get heavier than Uncle Pop-Popacato. And he ate my bathing-cake when I wasn't looking."

"Shall I say my grace, mummy?" asked Jack, skilfully changing the subject.

"Yes, certainly."

Jack returned thanks at the top of his voice without a mistake, said the "Amen" himself in order to thwart his mother, and pranced from the room after a futile attempt to get William to come too.

Mr. Winthrop gave a little sigh as the last imp vanished.

"My dear, they are getting too sensational," he said to his wife. "I felt as if I was at an *Adelphi* melodrama unfolded with the inconsequence of a French exercise. And who, pray, is Uncle Popacato, I think Polly said."

"Oh, I'm afraid I'm responsible for that," said Miss Allenby. "It was a story I told them this morning before bathing."

"And I can't bear not to know what happened when he came out at the New York telegraph-office," said Frank.

"Where did he come out from?" asked Mr. Winthrop.

"The Atlantic, father. He caught hold of a telegram."

"Oh, Mr. Frank, please don't," said Miss Allenby. "I wish Polly had never told you you might listen."

"I'm dumb. But when will the next chapter come out?"

"I think it will be unfinished. Mrs. Winthrop, may I take the imps over to tea with Lady Tenby? She asked me to yesterday evening."

"By all means. And if till then you are at leisure, Miss Allenby, would you mind copying out some Happy

Fortnight regulations ? There are several copies needed. You might do them in my room, so that you could ask me anything that was not quite clear, as I shall be with you."

This, coupled with various other innuendi that had fallen from Mrs. Winthrop (in particular the one indirectly arrived at by Polly's demanding the meaning of the word "flirt"), might easily be interpreted as of the nature of a new police-regulation, but Violet this morning was far too full of the joy of life to resent even in the most secret and remote manner the thought that surely gave birth to it. The warmth of the golden weather, the serene, braced health of her, the long, eager swim, the inimitable imps, and last (though whether the least or not she did not care to inquire) some delightful bond of comradeship that had sprung up between her and Frank, all combined to lay on her soul that magic touch which, like some spell of alchemy, some more potent philosopher's stone, turns everything, not to mere gold, but to happiness. It is a spell that comes we know not whence ; a hundred times we can reproduce the conditions which seemed to have given it to us, and yet the crowning incantation is unuttered. All the ingredients would seem to be there, deftly and duly stirred, but the change does not take place. They remain ingredients instead of being turned to gold. Then suddenly, on a day such as this was being to her, the wizard that controls our consciousness comes with the waving wand, and all our little everyday pleasures, trifles of the moment, pebbles of the sea-shore, are made into jewels, and the day lives in our memories for ever, a day to smile and be thankful over when storm-clouds gather and bitter winds freeze the bones. Fortunate are those so sweet of soul as to be able to smile, though tremulously, over the memory of

such days, to give thanks, though with lips that falter and quiver, over the imperishableness of them, for to others such memory brings but bitterness and envy and incredulous wonder at themselves, that they could even once, and long ago, have deceived themselves into thinking that happiness was possible, that misery was not the appointed lot of the unquiet sons of men. God knows they will learn their mistake some day, and the bitterness of the hour of blind learning will be seen by them to be tender after all.

Certainly the alchemy was at work to-day with Violet Allenby, and, sensible girl that she was, she was more than content to be under the spell without troubling to conjecture what it was. Even the regulations concerning the Happy Fortnight, and the tediousness of copying out these savage rules framed for the promotion of joy, became an entrancing occupation, and her heart, as she traced the large characters, so that any child could read them, quivered with secret laughter. The rules had to be written out on large sheets of white cardboard, and copies to be suspended on the wall at the foot of the beds in the fisherman's cottages where the happy children slept, so that these joyful admonitions might be the first things seen in the morning and the last at night. They took the form of a letter of advice, beginning :

“ DEAR CHILD,—

“ You have come here to be happy and good, and these few rules will help you. When you get up in the morning, remember to—

- “ 1. Brush your teeth.
- “ 2. Say your prayers.
- “ 3. Turn down your bed, and fold up your night-dress. You will not require to open your window, for it will have been open all night, rain or fine (see Rule 12).

“ 4. Do not allow yourselves to indulge in envious thoughts about those who always live by the sea, but be thankful for the privilege of living in town yourself, where there are so many interesting things.

“ 5. Masticate your food well, and do not talk with your mouth full.

“ 6. If another child is ill-tempered, or greedy, and untruthful, remember where it will go to unless it repents.

“ 7. Love one another.”

Even this farrago of moral and hygienic precepts, inspired by Mrs. Winthrop's savage piety and robustness of health, though it had to be copied out six times, and though the task was evidently found her in order to keep her away from Frank, brought nothing but happiness—grist to Violet's mill. And when that was over came the visit with the imps to Lady Tenby. There, too, as if in endorsement of the general irradiating benignity of the day, it appeared that her cold was miraculously better. There was already considerable warmth of feeling between the two, for Violet's adoration of the elder woman required no acuteness to see, while Lady Tenby, genial and jolly with everyone, could not fail to be attracted by the girl and her open affection. She was stamping about in a rose-bed when the three arrived, radiantly vigorous and abounding in earth-bedaubed.

“ I can't either kiss or shake hands with anyone,” she said, “ and I perceive relief written on the imps' faces. Polly, I shall dig a large hole for you here, and plant you, and you'll grow into a Polly-tree.”

“ What's that ?” asked Polly coldly. She wasn't sure that she liked Lady Tenby.

“ It's covered with small parrots,” said Lady Tenby.

“ I don't think it sounds pretty,” said Polly.

Jack felt that this was too unkind of Polly. He also

was not sure if he liked Lady Tenby, but there was no need to snub her, especially as she had asked them to tea.

"I think it sounds very pretty," he said. "Polly doesn't know, although she is nine."

A golf-ball at this moment descended among the group, followed a little afterwards by Ted.

"I'm sure I'm very sorry," he said. "I was practising a few lofting shots. You haven't seen any more come over?"

His mother laughed.

"Not one, dear. But there have been several sharp, mysterious rustles in the bushes, which I thought were cats."

"Topped shots—topped shots," said he. "Don't know what's the matter with my eye to-day. Now, imps, if you find three balls you may keep one."

The two children dived wildly into the bushes, and shrill announcements of treasure-trove arose.

"I've finished my gardening," said Lady Tenby, "and I shall go in and clean myself, as they say. I'm all mucky. I like the Saxon words. Come in with me, Miss Allenby. My dear, I know I shall call you Violet by mistake, so I shall do it on purpose instead."

"Oh, that's lovely of you," said the girl.

Lady Tenby laughed again loudly.

"An American friend of Ted's told me I was a lovely woman, the other day," she said, "and hastened to add, 'By lovely, Lady Tenby, we do not mean to allude to the personal appearance.' I told her she had raised my hopes for a moment, only to dash them again. What have you been doing all day, dear?"

"Oh, bathing, and telling the children a story, and copying out Mrs. Winthrop's rules for Happy Fortnights. Oh dear, they were so funny. But I think I've chiefly been tremendously happy."

"That's the best possible habit to form. You look as if it was habitual, dear. And what a nice evening we had yesterday! I've absolutely lost my heart to Mr. Frank, which is a serious thing at my age, when one has already lost one's youth, and looks, and teeth, and hair."

And she smiled, showing an excellent row of perfectly home-bred articles.

"Ah, fancy your talking about losing your youth," said Violet. "I was meaning to ask you what the secret of youth was. I'm sure you know."

"Why, that's as nice as being called a lovely woman, as long as you don't go and explain it away afterwards. My dear, the secret is so simple. Enjoy yourself."

Violet considered this. For a moment it seemed enlightening, the next it seemed that Lady Tenby might just as well have said: "The secret of keeping young is to remain youthful."

"Yes, but that is the same thing," she said. "How can you be sure of enjoying yourself? Oh, do tell me! You do it so beautifully, and all day I have been so tremendously happy that I feel there must be some recipe for it, which you know."

Lady Tenby took off one of her big gardening-gauntlets, and put her hand into the girl's arm.

"Well, I think trying to give other people a good time is one of the surest ways of enjoying yourself," she said.

"When you are really young and very pretty, my dear, and strong and well, the fact that you are all those things gives other people a good time, and you do it unconsciously. But when you become old and ugly, and have dreadful colds and rheumatics, like me, you can do a good deal towards making other people enjoy themselves, and so keeping young yourself, by pretending to be in tremendously good spirits. There is nothing so popular, if you pretend well."

Violet looked at her almost appealingly.

"Oh, but you never pretend, do you ?" she asked.

Whether she was young or old, ugly or lovely, there was no doubt that Lady Tenby was quick ; no doubt, either, that the desire for being liked and admired was a constant motive-power in her life. She saw at once that the idea that she pretended, played up, was distasteful to the girl, and hastened to remove the grounds of that apprehension. She laughed riotously almost.

"Indeed, I never do in big things," she said. "I have a temperament which it would not be absurd to call rollicking. I do enjoy myself enormously. But to say that one never meets little disappointments, or suffers from little ailments, which would spoil one's pleasure if one let them, would be false. Over these things I do pretend, and I am wise. If Ted wants to spend the whole autumn here, when I would rather be visiting my friends, it would be ridiculous of me, since I mean to make him enjoy himself as much as possible, not to pretend that I like nothing better than swimming, and gardening, and East Coast airs. Of course, I pretend that. Or, to take last night—to tell you truthfully, I had the most racking headache imaginable. Wasn't I right to pretend I was as jolly as possible ? Why, the effort to be jolly made me feel better. Do you think me a hypocrite, dear ?"

It was deftly done ; instead of a sort of vague disappointment being left in Violet's mind, there was a fresh glow of admiration kindled there at this big, open-air attitude towards life, this breezy contempt (if ever Lady Tenby thought of the subject at all) of possible inconveniences and troubles. She gave a long sigh.

"Oh, I think you're perfectly splendid !" she said.

She laughed again.

"My dear, you are easy to please !" she said. "What would you have me to do ? Put cold-cream on this

venerable nose, and tuck this great fiddle-head up in a blanket, and leave my darling Ted here by himself, whilst the Dowager Lady T. goes a round of visits—how I love that expression, like a boxing match—to her depressed friends ? No, thank you ! Now, I'm going to leave you for ten minutes' solid scrubbing, and then we'll all have the most enormous tea. I am so hungry.”

Lady Tenby ran upstairs to her bedroom, and began the cleaning operations. On her washing-table was a medicine-bottle, and during her cleansing she took a large dose out of it. She had implied, it is true, last night —she had even directly said it—that she took no remedies for a cold, but that remark, though superficially not quite true, had an excellent motive to excuse it, for Ted, if he sneezed once, tended to gargles and doses, and it was with the distinct and genuine desire of weaning him from habits that might tend to hypochondria that she adopted this drugless attitude. Masterine also certainly had an admirable effect, and this was another reason for taking it. But she would cheerfully have thrown it out of the window rather than that Ted should know she ever took it. Since it was of a hot, aromatic odour, she very carefully rinsed her mouth before she came downstairs again. But when she came downstairs she came down whistling.

All the evening the glow of her inward happiness warmed Violet through and through, and it was this visit to Lady Tenby that seemed to set the crown on it. Admirable as her spontaneous gaiety had always seemed to the girl, the knowledge that it was not always spontaneous, that a great loving tenderness that welled up from her big heart sometimes garbed it in spontaneity, so that her sacrifices and private desires might be the less suspected, made her the more worthy of the girl's love. And to-day

it seemed as if friendship, the friendship of a woman with a girl, that is often so splendid a thing, might easily spring up between them. And at that thought Violet felt the loneliness which had been hers for so long slip away from her, vanishing in the same moment as she perceived it. While it had been there, she had been scarcely conscious of it ; now that the beginnings of friendship dawned on her, she saw that it was darkness on which the light had risen. And she fell asleep, eager for the next day and for many days.

But whether it was that the excitement of this troubled her brain, or whether some less psychical cause was responsible, she had barely fallen asleep when she woke again in the clutch of nightmare. She thought that she had been swimming far out to sea, when a current swept her away out beyond all help or hope of rescue. Then, when she was in the very act of sinking, from somewhere behind her Frank came up with that great racing stroke of his, arm over arm, and held her up, telling her there was no danger, and with incredible swiftness and smoothness he swam with her shorewards. Then suddenly from the beach there put out a boat, which came hissing towards them, with feathers of spray rising round its bows. In it sat Lady Tenby, laughing loudly, with head thrown back and open throat. In her hand she held a golf-club, and as the boat came alongside of them, she hit Frank a terrific blow over the head, so that the blood spurted from him, and he sank without a word.

And, strangling and sweating from the horror of that, the girl awoke.

CHAPTER IV

THOUGH, as has been seen, it was a habit of Lady Tenby's to decry herself, to allude to her fiddle-head and rheumatic joints, it did not take any particular acuteness on the part of those to whom she used such depreciatory language to see that she was laying on the shadows unreasonably dark. But it is a fact that she used a sort of moral white paint also in certain of her allusions to herself, and this was laid on with a far more artful hand, the reason for the greater care in this respect perhaps being that the white paint was intended to escape detection, while she had no objection whatever to the self-painted shadows being instantly observed. Indeed, she intended them to be observed.

It must not be supposed that the white paint concealed any serious moral blemishes. Her life had been in the universal opinion of the world perfectly blameless, and, since she had arrived at the age of fifty-one with nothing but laudatory notices concerning her going about the world, the white paint must not be interpreted as an essential adjunct to the very pleasant appearance she presented—an adjunct, that is to say, without which she would have been really less presentable. She only used the white paint in little insignificant streaks and touches, just as she occasionally used the least little dabs of rouge when she had had a more than usually trying day, and wished to present an unfaded appearance at dinner, in order, as likely as not, to cheer somebody else up.

No one suspected the rouge any more than they suspected the white paint—and, indeed, one was as wholly innocent as the other.

Her conversation with Violet that afternoon contained one little streak of this kind which may be taken as absolutely typical. She had spoken of the unthinkable-ness of her paying rounds of visits to friends, leaving Ted, who preferred his golf and his East Coast, alone. That put her in an amiable light, and did no harm to anybody. But, as a matter of fact, the disappointed houses were not so very numerous. Nor were the entreaties of hosts so very urgent. For she was one of those people who, for some reason, are blessed rather with an ardent circle of new friends than with the sturdy circle of old ones. Those who did not know her very well as a rule liked her most, for, to give her her due, she, with her eager impulsive nature, which was quite genuine, gave of her best first, not keeping the best vintage till men had well drunk. It was not that she gave an inferior vintage afterwards : indeed, she always gave the same vintage ; but, to continue the gastronomical metaphor, the draught was one that tastes quite delicious at first, but not quite so nice afterwards. The fault may be in the draught itself, or it may quite possibly lie in the palate of the drinker.

Certainly she had given of her very best to Violet, and it was no wonder that the girl thought she had never tasted so exquisite a draught. And if it was a little artificially flavoured, which of us is there, after all, who exhibits himself, even to his most intimate friends, with complete frankness and sincerity ? Indeed, without any cynicism at all about the matter, it is open to doubt as to whether such a practice would give pleasure either to the exhibitor or the spectator.

A little insincerity, then, but that without doubt of a

harmless and even laudable kind, may be entered—one small item—against the plentiful credit on the opposite page of Lady Tenby's moral account-book. It was small; it concerned itself only with little things, and, indeed, she had confessed to and justified its existence already in her expounded philosophy of “playing up” and pretending to be extremely comfortable and well pleased, even when she was suffering from a racking headache. It was no more than that which led her to take surreptitious doses of masterine, while disclaiming the use of drugs, or that made her permit Violet to infer the existence of country-houses that clamoured for her. And another reason—a wholly admirable one—of which, again, she did not speak, would certainly have led her to reject these urgent appeals for her presence, even if they had existed; she was genuinely and whole-heartedly devoted to her son, and she knew no better happiness than to be constantly with him. Indeed, on the subject of him, a perpetual struggle of maternal desires went on in her mind. She wanted to see him married, and, as she had said, she would forgive his growing up if only he would present her with grandchildren; but, on the other hand, the thought of giving him up to another woman, who would fill, and more than fill, the place she now occupied, was almost insupportable to her. She was accustomed, indeed, often to put the matter to herself in a ludicrously exaggerated manner, but in a manner that parodied something which had a real basis of fact, and tell herself that if he would only marry a hideous but prolific woman, whom he detested, she would be satisfied. Somehow his detestation of this imagined helpmate must not make him unhappy, for that would be a fatal objection to the whole plan; but he would have to be amused at it all, and laugh over it with her. The only alternative was that he must marry a girl so charming that even his

mother would be forced to see that Ted could not and should not help loving her.

At present neither of these somewhat divergent types had made an appearance. It was clearly out of the question to make active search for the former, as conceived in Lady Tenby's humorous image, and the emotional indolence of her son had not at present led him to prosecute any very urgent inquiries for the latter. Indeed, his mother half-feared, yet half-hoped, that this indolence would prevent him ever achieving a successful chase, since other young men, more actively endowed, would probably pursue and capture such paragons as these, whenever and wherever appearing, before Ted had shaken off dull sloth. Some very vigorous virgin really was required, who, Atalanta-like, would conduct the chase herself, and come, dewy and bright-haired, to where Ted, her quarry, lay dozing in his lair. Then perhaps there would be some chance of his marrying her. But, as Lady Tenby rapidly perceived, as she thought over this brilliant picture, she would have to be a very exceptional young woman.

In every heart, even the most uncomplicated, desires are found in layers together, like the strata of the rocks, and often they are so bent and twisted that it is hard to tell which is the lowest, or which, when the upheaval of the crust first took place, lay nearest to the central fire and force. In this case of Lady Tenby it would be difficult to be quite certain on the point, but it is probable that if her inmost desire was certainly ascertainable, it would have been that she would have chosen for the rest of her life to live with her son, and that immediately on her death he should marry the most beautiful, the richest, and the loveliest girl the world contained. She had often told herself that this was not so—that, provided he married a woman either odious enough or

delightful enough, she would give up her place to-morrow, and retire to the not inconvenient dower-house at Northwood, which at present she let somewhat advantageously. But her sincerity may be questioned : it seemed likely that, wholly (or almost wholly) unconsciously, she had put one judicious little dab of white paint over her real desire, and had done it with such cunning that she herself really quite forgot that it was there. That is one of the advantages of habitually keeping the whole truth about oneself from oneself : in a little while the mind becomes unaware that these small deceptions are being practised on it, and so, we may hope, is morally innocent of them.

It has been said that Lady Tenby's circle of friends was rather of the bright and new sort than the old and well-used kind, and this habit of not being quite sincere (though so very nearly) may have had some effect on this. For when all is said and done, it is not the amusing and the high-spirited, not even the courageous only—and courageous she certainly was—that a man wants to see seated by his fireside when the wine is drunk and guests are gone, and the wit and the joke are silent, and the lights in the grand candelabra are extinguished, but those whom he instinctively trusts, to whom he can open his heart in supreme certainty that sympathy and secrecy will be his. It is not meant to be implied that nobody ever spoke to Lady Tenby of their most intimate affairs ; often the bright, new friends did so, and she seemed to enter into their troubles or their joys with the zest that characterized all her dealings with the world. But somehow they did not often continue the practice ; things which should not have been repeated appeared somehow to have slipped out. Thus, after a while, they took their confidences elsewhere, or did what is often the wisest thing of all, ceased to make them.

Another trait, finally, may help to account for this

lady's deficiency in old friends—a point somewhat more subtle and psychological. Of her high spirits, her jovial welcome of the ordinary social commerce, there was no doubt whatever, and as high spirits and geniality are the most popular gifts in the world, since they are so instantaneously infectious, she should have been the most desired of habitués, for she had great vitality, and kept it always in evidence. But though at first it seemed to be vitalizing and spirit-raising to those who were favoured with the exhibition of it, most people before long found it to be tiring and devitalizing. It was somewhat like alcohol: for a while it gave a vigorous fillip to a too languid circulation; then came the reaction, and fatigue set in. But poor Lady Tenby was convinced, this time with complete and rather pathetic sincerity, that she was constantly giving her own superabundant vitality to her friends. She did not grudge it them in the least; there was nothing she liked better than to feel that she was invigorating everybody, even though she felt tired afterwards. The sad part was that after her friends came to know her well it was they who felt tired afterwards.

Her son's indolence has been mentioned: here very largely was the rather tragic explanation of it. His mother, convinced that she was continually pouring streams of elixir of life into him, that without her he would sink into real apathy of spirit, had in point of fact done no more than take the plug out of the psychic reservoir with which Nature had endowed him, and this force was for ever leaking away. But she had not the gift of drawing it into herself: she was no vampire—if she had been there would have been some compensation; she would at least have had the benefit of the vitality which she sapped others of. But that was denied her; she merely tired them, without feeling correspondingly fresh herself.

But Violet at present was a new friend, and the continued effect of Lady Tenby was not evident in her yet, nor, indeed, might it be expected to make itself felt for months to come, for Lady Tenby often invigorated people during quite long periods ; the reaction was not one that set in at once. Moreover, Violet was young and strong, and gifted with a very good quality of life herself, and in the days that immediately followed she told herself that she was learning much about that fire and youth which Lady Tenby seemed to possess in such perennial vigour. She never seemed to have an idle moment ; there never seemed to come to her a moment which did not yield its quota of interest and enjoyment. Certainly whatever her hand found to do (and her hand was singularly fertile in discovery) she did it with all her might, and to Violet it seemed that she was being shown life on a higher plane, worked with a higher power than any exhibition of it which had yet come under her notice. True, she had the privilege of watching the methods of Mrs. Winthrop ; but—and the metaphor leaped into her mind with certainty and precision—being with Lady Tenby was like being out of doors in a day of high wind in spring ; the movement and rush of it was irresistibly bracing ; whereas being with Mrs. Winthrop was like sitting in a strong draught. The attraction was mutual also, and Lady Tenby, whose mind always was attracted towards the practical and tangible side of people, not reasoning about their character in the abstract, but seeing what they were actually fit for in this joyful world, found herself thinking that, if only Violet had been wealthy, or if she had had “people,” she would have been just the sort of girl to whom she would willingly have given Ted, it being understood that it was not to the odious type, of whom even she could not have been jealous, that Violet belonged. Violet’s devotion to her also would

have been remarkably convenient. As things were, however, such an idea only occurred to her conditionally ; an attempt to make a match of it never entered her head. Besides, her very quick and percipient eye thought that it detected a somewhat vivid interest in the girl displayed by that perfectly charming and suitable Frank Winthrop. That would be, to her mind, a delightful match, for she was unworldly enough to applaud an unworldly match on the part of the son of other people. The Winthrops were quite wealthy enough not to object to a match that brought no dowry, for they had no "position"—that very expensive luxury—to keep up, and, as far as Lady Tenby knew, they had not got any "people" either. Tenbys, in fact, were Tenbys, and Winthrops only Winthrops.

All through the week which preceded Frank's departure for Cairo the same perfection of weather lasted, and on one sunny morning towards the close of it Lady Tenby was seated in the little awning-sheltered platform that stood at the seaward end of the garden, with a pair of excellent binoculars, with which she often observed the life and habits of birds in the bushes, or sometimes of people on the beach. Ted had gone to his golf ; she herself was cooling down after an active hour among weeds in her garden-beds, and even while she sat here the aromatic smoke of their burning reached her—a sort of testimonial to her own industry. Directly in front of her was the narrow path that ran along the extreme edge of the cliff, which plunged sheerly down a hundred feet on to the beach. Below, the tide was out, and the shining flat of sands, with the streaks and ribands of bright pebbles, and the black posts of the groins erected against the encroachments of the sea, stretched far out, peopled with swarms of apparently amphibious children, and

helpless parents and caretakers. Bird-life was rather quiet for the moment, and she turned her attention to the more thickly populated beach. Being alone, and not having to make any efforts for the sake of other people, her energy and joviality was a little relaxed, and, summer-like though the weather was, she was conscious of an autumn touch in her own self that made her a little envious of that helter-skelter activity on the sands. Full of life though she still was, there was no doubt that she had passed her fiftieth year ; she was on the tableland at the top of life, and when she moved off that it must be to go down-hill. And it seemed unfair that there should be so many people younger than herself, women and girls who were still climbing upwards, with new views and splendours continually dawning on them, while she, with all the potentiality of youth still in her, with all youth's eagerness to enjoy the surge and effervescence of life, should be handicapped with incipient wrinkles and these decades of years, and grey lines in her hair. It was one of her favourite doctrines that everybody was the age he felt, that as long as a man or woman continued to feel young, young he remained, but, admirable though the theory was, it did not always work smoothly in practice. She, it is true, might feel young—she might have a great power of associating with young people in a way that made her, at any rate, forgetful of her age, but probably those who were really young saw the difference. Frank, she felt sure, looked upon her as quite an old woman . . . and again her thoughts went back to the conjunction of Violet and that splendid youth ; they did not need to tell themselves they felt young, because they were young.

Once more her thoughts had jibbed back to this unprofitable subject of age, and, with her practical good sense, she invoked the aid of material interests, since her mind needed something definite to employ itself on,

and took up her binoculars. There was Mrs. Winthrop just coming out of the sea after her bathe, hurrying through the shallow water ; a little way out a comfortable circular-looking object in stripes of red and white denoted her husband. He did not exactly swim, though he did not sink ; he lay about in the water, and made occasional movements with his hands and legs. Then a young man—Frank, clearly—barefooted and bareheaded, dressed only in trousers and shirt, stepped into a boat and shoved off. Clearly he was going to bathe from deep water, instead of tramping out through the shallows. Off he went, with vigorous strokes of the oar, till he had attained a decent distance from land. Then in a moment or two he was in his bathing-dress, and disappeared over the side of the boat.

On the beach, again, there was no mistaking the imps. The hour of their bathing had not yet come, but they were happily employed on an enormous sand-castle, into the moat of which the tide, already flowing, had begun to trickle. According to custom, they were already prepared for the bathe, as soon as the stroke of midday sounded ; and Miss Allenby, with her dressing-gown over her bathing-dress and (to Lady Tenby's wondering surprise) black stockings over her strong, slim calves, was standing in the main hall of the castle, pointing out a weak spot in the outer rampart. Then along the sands from the direction of Raythorpe came another familiar figure, rather portly and slow-moving, carrying a golf-club, with which every now and then it made little half-swing at pebbles or pieces of seaweed. But how very odd that Ted should be on the beach now. Perhaps he had not been able to get a match at golf. But then, in the ordinary course of events, he would have got the professional to play with him, or have spent the morning in practising mashie-shots.

Lady Tenby had no notion, to give her her due, that she was spying. The beach was a public place ; she had a perfect right to observe, even with binoculars, what went on there. But in her heart she was spying : she wanted, that is to say, to observe what happened without being observed herself. She was overlooking what went on in exactly the same spirit as she would have been overhearing what went on had she applied her ear to a keyhole. But it did not strike her in that light. If it had she might have stopped.

Ted came sauntering along till he arrived at the sand-castles, and, in answer apparently to an invitation from the owners, paid a call. The great hall was of such an extent that it held him and Miss Allenby quite easily, and Jack could put one foot inside it, while he feverishly buttressed the weak corner. But in stepping out he forgot how high the wall was, and fell down quite flat in the moat, which, like all well-conducted moats, was full of water. The splash was so big that it could easily have been seen from where Lady Tenby was sitting without the aid of binoculars, and it drenched Ted from head to foot. Also, in trying to save himself, Jack made a serious breach in the castle-wall, and the moat water poured in, and Polly, with wild squeals of anger, spanked him with the flat of her spade.

Ted stepped briskly to land, the great hall being no longer habitable to the fully-clothed, while Miss Allenby, in her black stockings, stood her ground and worked zealously at the breach in the walls, using Polly's spade, which she wrested from her for that purpose.

Jack picked himself up, and, by way of retaliation, scooped water with his spade into Polly's face. Upon which the spadeless Polly seized her bucket, and ladled

water over Jack. Then she fell down too, and, apparently under promise of truce, her spade was returned, and both imps set to work again on the castle.

Miss Allenby waded out of the great hall, converted for the moment into the aquarium, and stood talking to Ted for a minute or two. She pointed to the row of tents, indicating a particular one, which stood rather apart from the rest, which Lady Tenby saw to be her own. Then Ted came up the beach and disappeared behind the edge of the cliff in front of his mother. Then twelve o'clock sounded ; the imps stuck their spades in the sand and rushed into the water, followed at scarcely less speed by Miss Allenby.

Lady Tenby (like all nice women) was tremendously interested in the affairs of young men and maidens, and, as those affairs went forward, she looked to see what had happened to Frank. That wily young gentleman, it will be remembered, had rowed himself out in a boat, and bathed from that, in order to make it appear to his mother that he had nothing whatever to do with the imps or their governess. And now Lady Tenby saw him swimming rapidly landwards, having left orders with his boatman, apparently, to keep his distance from land, so that, the swim (and the meeting) being over, Frank might dress again on the high seas, and be rowed discreetly to shore.

And how well Lady Tenby knew how Violet felt ! Frank, with his masculine mind, had made the plan ; she, the feminine, without a word being spoken, had fallen in with it. She was doing nothing more than what she did every morning. It would have been much odder if she had not taken her daily swim than if she had. But—bless her charming face ! so thought Lady Tenby—she knew that Frank had rowed out to bathe from his boat. That was no reason why she should not have her swim.

Of *course*, it was not an additional reason why she should.

So Miss Allenby swam out on the side-stroke, and Frank, with a wake of foam and head submerged, was coming straight in towards her. What a surprise for both when they met! Oh yes; things were undoubtedly going on.

For the moment she had forgotten about Ted, but at this point her attention was called back to him by the sight of his hat moving along behind a hedge of buck-thorn not many yards from her. He went straight to the house, and in a very short space of time reappeared again, with towel and bathing-dress over his arm. He apparently did not see her; she apparently did not see him; and, walking rather more briskly than his wont, he disappeared again down the steep sand-path leading to the beach. She ought to have been much pleased by this, for she often urged him to bathe, but without success. He said it put his eye out for golf. But now, when of his own initiative he had gone to do what she had so often recommended, she was not quite sure if she was pleased or not. For she was not certain whether it was of his own initiative, or whether, as seemed possible, Miss Allenby had hinted at the pleasures of the sea. Yet Miss Allenby was prosecuting her affairs in deep waters. Ted probably would not go out so far as that.

Lady Tenby had not been quite certain, a quarter of an hour ago, whether she would bathe or not. Now her mind was quite made up, and the reasons that made it up were almost entirely nice and sympathetic. She wanted tremendously to be in the middle of all these young people, who were not making plans at all, but just doing what instinct and nature prompted. Frank had bathed from the boat in order that his mother should not see him bathing with Miss Allenby (which he fully

intended to do). Miss Allenby had entered the water with the imps, in order to swim out quite innocently and naturally, and there found Frank, who had left the beach quite a long time ago. Ted, finally, who never bathed at all, was on his way down now simply because Miss Allenby was bathing. It was all so young, and so right, and proper, and jolly. Every kind woman who had not lost all feeling of youth would bathe, even if she had a much worse cold than Lady Tenby had, in order to be in the middle of it all. She had no intention of being chaperonish ; she wanted to splash about too, and recapture all that they were feeling. Or did she intend to be chaperonish ? Well, perhaps she might look after Ted just a little bit.

He was already in his tent when she got down to the beach, and peremptorily refused her admittance. But Miss Allenby and the imps were housed near by, and she made ready there. Ted had preceded her, and was being detained for the moment by the imps, who were regarding him critically.

“ Your legs are as fat as father’s,” said Polly, who meant this rather as a compliment. “ Will you take me out on your shoulders, and then drop me ?”

“ Me too,” said Jack, preparing to mount.

“ Oh, here’s Lady Tenby. She’ll take you out, Jack.”

Jack did not really want this arrangement at all, but he was polite by nature, except with Polly.

“ Oh, Lady Tenby,” he said, “ will you take me out, and drop me where it’s deep ? Then, if I sink much, you rescue me.”

“ And Lord Tenby take me,” said Polly.

“ Ted, my dear, I am glad you’ve come to bathe,” said his mother. “ Yes ; get up, Jack.”

The two children were hoisted into their places, and dropped into four-foot water. Polly sank a good deal,

and was eventually pulled up with her small face screwed into unimaginable contortions.

"I sank, but I swam," she remarked.

"I didn't sink," squealed Jack, "and I moved once."

"You're both very accomplished," said Ted.

"What's that?" asked Polly. "Is it good or bad? I say, Lord Tenby, is this the first time you've bathed this year?"

"Yes."

"I am sorry for you. And can you swim, or do you sink, like Miss Allenby's uncle?"

"I swim," said he. "How do you know Miss Allenby's uncle sinks?"

"'Corse he does, as he's made of pure gold. Fancy not knowing that!"

Lady Tenby had cast a search-eye out over the sea. Frank's boat was still in charge of the fisherman; two heads rose and fell over wave-crest and into wave-trough on the seaward side of it. Clearly, if she and Ted were going to join the dance, they would have a long way to go. But at this remark she attended to Polly again.

"Polly, do you want me to carry you out to sea, as I did the other day?" she asked.

"No, thank you," said Polly. "I should like Lord Tenby to, though."

"Ted, you're caught," said his mother. "But tell us more about Miss Allenby's uncle."

"Oh, it's a story, but it's one of the nicest sort, because some of it's true. She has an uncle, who's much richer than anybody else. And he walked across to America on the bottom of the sea. *I think* that's partly story."

"Of course it is," said Jack. "Polly believes everything Miss Allenby says. Oh, there's a crab! Let's put it in the moat."

The crab thought not, and Lady Tenby and Ted left the imps disputing this point with it. Strange allusions to a garden-party, and whether it was polite to put guests in moats, formed part of the discussion, but Lady Tenby did not find these as interesting as Miss Allenby's uncle. She wanted to hear more about him.

"The water is delicious to-day," she said, as they waded out over the warm shallows. "I see a boat right out there. Shall we swim to it, Ted?"

"Not too far for you?"

"Not a bit. I wonder whose it is."

"I think," remarked Ted, with the air of trying to recollect something accurately, "that I saw Frank Winthrop row out. Perhaps he is bathing from it?"

"Very likely. I don't see Violet. Isn't she bathing this morning?"

"She was down here half an hour ago. Perhaps she is in the water."

This was all absurd, manufactured talk. But there was no need to manufacture more, since swimming and conversation are barely compatible, and they went on their way in silence. A little west wind swept down the coast, giving foam-caps to the blue ripples, and the sea-shore sparkled with the light of the lucent noon.

Lady Tenby, who did so many things decently, was more than a decent swimmer, and they soon arrived at the boat, and learned the surprising news that it was Frank's, and that he and a young lady were swimming together. Indeed, at the moment Frank and the young lady were not far off, and the two pairs joined.

"So much nicer than a garden-party, or any other party," said Lady Tenby. "Good-morning, Mr. Frank. Violet, dear, how nice to find you are staying in this Blue House, too! The imps have been telling us about your golden uncle. He sounds fascinating."

Violet laughed.

"Oh, he doesn't matter," she said. "But what a nice name for the sea ! We're all staying at the Blue House. I believe it's the first time Lord Tenby has stayed here."

"It is," said he. "I've always said 'no' before. Mistake of mine. I had no idea they had such pleasant people in it."

"Ted thought only lobsters and crabs stayed there," said his mother. "There's dressed crab for lunch. I remember ordering it."

"And you haven't asked me," said Frank.

"No ; it was a pleasure I saved up till now. Will you ? You hinted as much, Mr. Frank—you must come now."

"Please. I did hint, didn't I ?"

"Quite distinctly. It was nice of you. And have you and Violet been having a lovely swim ? You looked so far away from shore that it appeared you were going outside the three-mile limit to elope, as if it were Gretna Green."

Frank was alongside of her, and turned a merry face to her.

"No such luck," he said, in a low voice.

"Poor, blighted boy ! It's almost your last chance, too, isn't it ? When are you off to Cairo again ?"

"Day after to-morrow, worse luck."

"I must order my mourning," said she. "And how many mourners will go into colours again when you get there ?"

"Two bull-dogs, and perhaps a polo-pony, if he happens to remember me."

"Ah, I'm not worthy of being a confidante ! That is it. But you don't mind my wearing mourning, I hope, when you go."

He laughed.

"I think you'd look splendid in black," he said. "I encourage it."

Lady Tenby's thoughts of chaperonage had rather deserted her. She did not feel anything like fifty-one as she paddled about in the transparent Blue House talking to this very attractive youth. It was not that she had any intention of indulging in that rather ghoulish form of flirtation, where an elderly woman lays herself out to enthrall a young man ; simply this charming party in the sea made her feel young herself, and, forgetful of age and sex, she said the sort of things to Frank that a contemporary subaltern might have done. An hour ago in the garden-shelter she had felt so old—now reaction had come, and she really cared very little that Ted and Violet were a hundred yards away, drifting landward on the flood-tide together. Beside, the story of the uncle made of gold was a perfectly new factor. Yet she did not state this frankly to herself, but it formed a very real reason for her acquiescence in the two swimming off together. Another real reason was that being out here with Frank made her feel young. He was so vigorous, and good to look on, so completely in harmony with the salt freshness of the sea, the foam-capped ripples, with the exuberance of the golden morning, that she, too, was infected by the environment of youth and the flowing tide, and the years seemed to be washed off from her, and be dissolved in the eternal spring of the Blue House.

Frank climbed back into his boat, after escorting Lady Tenby part of the way to the shore, in a mixture of exhilaration and depressed spirits. These opposing sentiments did not mingle together and form an atmosphere of moderate content, but existed side by side, each unmixed and intense. There was no question whatever that all the incense obtainable must be burned at Miss

Allenby's shrine ; there was no question either that the goddess looked kindly on him. He had not repeated his original mistake of telling her that she was pretty, but his admiration had expressed itself in ways not less explicit because they were not so baldly stated. And surely she looked kindly on him, for she must have known, when she left the imps to their devices in the shallow water, that she would meet him out here. Meet him she did ; he had taken good care of that. And Lady Tenby, jovial, delightful woman as she was, had seemed to guess all this, to judge from her gratifying, but slightly embarrassing, remark about the three-mile limit. He thought of her as a sort of irresponsible aunt, one who, having no duties of any kind towards him, need not couple her discernment with warnings and good advice. And, indeed, neither were in the least needed. In a couple of days now he would leave for Egypt again, and though the enchantment of the girl had grown much stronger since that night, nearly a week ago, when he had first been conscious of its spell, he had no intention of doing impossible things, or of proposing to her, or of telling his father that he was in love with her. Ardent though he was, he was quite sensible, and whatever the state of his heart might be, his head knew well that he had to go back to his regiment. Even if she, too—a dazzling possibility—liked him very much, it was folly for him to try to ascertain that on the very eve of his departure. Besides, there was no reason to suppose that she did. She liked him, no doubt, as she liked the imps and swimming—that was all. And a heavy sigh as he slipped into his shirt denoted the presence of the depression side by side with the exhilarated mood. But decidedly there was a good deal of potential electricity abroad that day.

Frank came to lunch, and did his duty by the dressed crab, and after he had gone mother and son sat together

in the veranda overlooking the sea. Then Ted administered a slight shock to his mother.

"I asked Miss Allenby to dine to-night," he said. "She said she thought she could, and would let us know. I think she is perfectly charming. And don't you call her one of the prettiest girls you ever saw ?"

But the thought of the golden uncle mitigated the shock, and Lady Tenby gave a sufficiently cordial agreement.

CHAPTER V

FRANK had chosen to stay at High Beach an extra night, and leave at some dim hour between four and five the next morning, in order to catch the special from town in connection with his steamer at Southampton, rather than travel up, as he had originally intended, the evening before, and sleep in London. His ostensible reason for this—namely, that it was a nuisance to be in London for a night in September, with the prospect of spending the evening alone—was sufficiently sound to pass muster, and when, on the top of that, he produced the further reason that hotels were expensive, and he intended to be tremendously economical, his motive might even be called laudable. True, his mother was able to recommend him a very cheap, clean hotel near Waterloo, and a vegetarian restaurant, where you could enjoy a meal that literally reeked of proteids at a purely nominal cost, but even she, with her sanguine, propagandist spirit, did not expect her recommendation to be taken seriously, and was secretly pleased that Frank should stay. For before now he had shown sometimes a predisposition to solitary nights in London, even in September, in connection with curiously early-morning appointments with a dentist or a tailor, which had not entirely met with her approval, for it had leaked out casually later that the play at the Gaiety had been very amusing, a place of entertainment of which (as of many others) she cordially disapproved. Whether she would have approved much more of Frank's

domestic preference now, had she known what fired the ingenuity which thought of these excellent reasons for stopping at High Beach, need not concern us.

The last two days had passed without much outward significance of events, and Frank had shown none of that libertine spirit which had so distressed his mother a week ago. The imps had been rather more than usually tiresome, and one day they had been deprived of their bathe, since a pear-tree in the garden had been found to be almost completely denuded of its fruit (which that year was unusually plentiful) since breakfast that morning. Mrs. Winthrop had been saving up its fruit to make a particular sort of pear-preserve of a highly nutritious character, but her motive in depriving the imps of their bathe must not be entirely put down to revenge, for it would have been highly risky to let them enter the sea after so Gargantuan an effort. So that morning Miss Allenby, and Frank, and the Tenbys bathed together. Miss Allenby had been busy, when the imps did not claim her time and attention, with the preparation of circulars dealing with Mrs. Winthrop's winter campaign of prevention, and discouragement, and promotion, and she had dined once and lunched once (the imps having been put to bed before lunch on that day, owing to deeds too impolite to stain the pages of this chronicle) with Lady Tenby, which seemed almost excessive hospitality to extend to a governess, and Lord Tenby had just not won a bogey-competition. But otherwise, except that she herself had woke in the night with a headache, which was quite well again in the morning, Mrs. Winthrop would have been unable, even while events were fresh in her memory, to enumerate more than these.

And yet, though the days had been so devoid of outward significance, things big with potential energy had occurred. For it was as when a man walks across a field of vigorous

soil, and scatters seeds thereon. Those little casts of his hand look to be of small import, and when he has passed the field is solitary again and quiet. And for weeks it lies solitary and quiet, warmed by sun, and watered by showers and dews of night. Then it is solitary no longer, but covered with the springing ears. And when September comes again, the tall waving of the ripened corn shows the significance of the man who came and went almost unnoticed so many months before.

It was Frank's last evening, an evening that was dark and overcast with clouds, and when on the stroke of seven the imps had to go to bed, leaving a game of croquet in a thoroughly interesting condition, it was almost too dark for Miss Allenby and Frank to finish it. Originally, Jack had played two balls against Polly and Miss Allenby, the match being "Men and Women," and designed to show that women were the superior sex in every respect, even in matters of croquet. But Jack had so persistently played with the wrong ball that he had allowed Frank to direct the destinies of "yellow," and even then women distinctly held the upper hand. The imps had raced to the usually abhorred night-nursery, because, when they announced by shrill screams from the upper window that they were actually ready to get into bed, to the satisfaction of their nurse, both with regard to ablutions and oblations, Miss Allenby had promised to tell them more about the golden uncle until the dressing-bell had rung, and five more minutes had elapsed after that. So for this interval she and Frank were alone.

"I should like to finish the game," he said, "and demonstrate the superiority of my sex. I suppose after this you will join mother in the suffragette campaign."

The girl laughed.

"Not even beating you would induce me to do that,"

she said. "And it is too dark, don't you think? Besides, I shall have to go to the imps in ten minutes."

"Oh, hang the imps," said he. "You can tell them the story to-morrow, and the next day, and next week. Or may I come and listen to the story? Do let me."

The girl raised her eyebrows.

"Oh, I don't think that would do," she said. "You see——" and she stopped.

Frank was feeling a little desperate. It was his last evening here, he was going away to-morrow for nearly a year, and he wanted some expression of friendliness from her. He told himself he did not want more than that.

"You mean that my mother comes up to wish them good-night," he said hastily.

The girl flushed; it was exactly that which she had left unspoken.

"I don't think you've got any right to put things into my mouth that I did not say," she said.

That was only just.

"I know I haven't," he said. "I'm sorry; please forget it. I say, Miss Allenby, may I write to you, and tell you how the dogs are, and my ponies? You said you would like to know."

Violet looked at him.

"Yes, I should like to know," she said. "But do you think that would be wise?"

"Oh, I promise you only to write about dogs and ponies," he said rather savagely, knowing he was making it awkward for her, and for the moment not caring. But Miss Allenby turned the tables on him rather neatly, without violence or resentment.

"Of course, it could only be about dogs and ponies," she said. "What else could there be for you to write to me about?"

Frank's natural good-humour came to his aid, and he laughed.

"Quite so," he said. "That's what I was saying. You can read it all out aloud at breakfast-time. But I should like to write to you about them. It's—it's been so jolly here."

Violet tried to imagine herself opening a letter with Egyptian stamps on it under Mrs. Winthrop's eye, and her attempt was vain. Her imagination could not really picture the scene. For Mrs. Winthrop, who was always down when the post arrived in the morning, habitually looked at the letters of others, and went so far as to ask whom they were from. As she always told the breakfast-table at large whom she heard from, it did not seem unreasonable to ask a similar confidence from them. The idea therefore of receiving letters from Frank did not lie within the scope of a sane imagination.

"Oh, really, Mr. Frank, I think you had better not write to me," she said, "though it would be very nice to hear——"

Loud screams came from an upper window, and the girl turned on him a face that he could see even in the dark was a little flushed.

"And the imps are calling," she said rather unnecessarily. "I must go."

For a moment Frank rather lost control of himself. She enchanted while she rebuffed him.

"If I hadn't got to go——" he began, and stopped abruptly. "I suppose that's all, then, Miss Allenby," he added.

She looked at him, and at the moment something within her, but something remote and imprisoned, seemed to make an echo to his trouble and his eagerness. But in her answer the same echo made itself heard.

"Yes, I must go," she said. "And please don't come to the nursery."

But even as she turned from him the memory of these last days, with his excellent companionship, and his admiration of her, a thing which a girl may deprecate, but cannot possibly dislike, came over her, demanding a warmer recognition.

“But it has been jolly, as you said,” she added—“awfully jolly.”

And she hurried indoors, wondering a little how far she had been wise to say that.

The family were alone that night, and after quieting the imps (who had got rather excited over the golden uncle’s adventures in the prairie, where he met alarming specimens of the gold-eating rattlesnake) with a long description of the town where everybody went to sleep as soon as they got to bed, Violet dressed, and went down to dinner. Lady Tenby, it appeared, was going to hop across (her own phrase) for a rubber afterwards, and to say good-bye to Frank, and soon after she appeared Violet slipped away. But her exit, which she intended to be unperceived, failed in this regard, and Frank, being dummy at the time, got up.

“It’s good-bye, then, Miss Allenby,” he said. “I believe you were going without saying it.”

She neither admitted or denied this.

“Yes, you are off so early,” she said. “I do hope you will have a good time, and that the dogs and ponies will be well.”

“Frank, we are waiting for you,” said his mother.

He held her hand a moment longer.

“Au revoir, Miss Allenby,” he said.

Violet went straight to her room, where, unlike the exemplary inhabitants of Sleepiopolis, of whom she had told the imps, she did not succeed in falling asleep for some time. She, usually so content, so much accustomed

to find life simple and uncomplicated, found herself wishing that everything was different, or (which came to the same thing) that she was. She wished, first of all, that Frank was not going away to-morrow, and in the same moment she wished that he had never come home at all. She wondered if she had been unkind to him in that little dusky talk before dinner, and in the same moment told herself that she must be off her head in imagining that she, the imps' governess and no more, could possibly be unkind to this young soldier with all the world before him, and the dogs in Egypt panting for his return. She would so much have liked to hear from him about the dogs, but she liked even more the fact of his desire to write to her about them, though she had been perfectly wise in her refusal to accept so innocent a pleasure. But had she made it clear that she would have liked it ? did he know that her heart thanked him for the thought ? Or had she been prim, and had she been unkind ? She could easily have thought of some plan by which he could write to her at a poste-restante address, so that his letters should not come under the scrutiny of Mrs. Winthrop. But at that thought she suddenly felt herself blushing for shame, all alone as she was, and in the dark. How could she have imagined (even all alone and in the darkness) saying such a thing to him, inviting him (for it was no less than that) to enter into a clandestine correspondence, even though it dealt only with dogs and ponies ?

She got over her blush ; she was only blushing at what she had not done. But what did he mean by assuring her that his letters—had they been permitted—would only have been about dogs and ponies ? Was there in his mind some thought of writing about, well, anything else ? If not, why did it occur to him to tell her that he would not do so ? Was he thinking of anything else ?

Was he thinking not of dogs and ponies at all, but of her ? She hoped not ; honestly she hoped not. Equally honestly she hoped so.

Outside the grey clouds that had overspread the sky that afternoon had windlessly thickened and gathered, and now through her open window she could hear the sibilant hissing of the rain on the shrubs. Once or twice a distant flash of lightning cast the shadows of the window-bars on to her blind, and very distant and drowsy thunder answered. Everything in the house was still. Everybody probably was asleep.

And then there came over her that strange and dreadful feeling of loneliness that sometimes comes even to those who are most surrounded by friends and loved ones. She felt lost—a solitary denizen in encompassing darkness, where there was nobody. Womanlike, she wanted to belong to somebody, and have someone to care for, someone in whom she could truly lose herself. She did not long for anybody individually—not Frank, certainly, not Lady Tenby, not the imps. She was just waiting in a darkness thicker than that which lay close in these small hours of the weeping September night, waiting for someone to find her. . . .

She dozed off into the twilight of sleep, and woke again, still finding darkness and hearing the hissing of the rain, and dozed a second time into the complete darkness of sleep. When she woke it was on the twilight of morning that she opened her eyes, and early though it was there was some stir of movement in the house. In a few minutes she heard the crunch of wheels on the gravel below, gradually getting fainter. And she remembered who it was who was leaving so early.

Violet proved during the next day or two the truth of one of the little mottoes by which Lady Tenby so success-

fully ordered her life, namely, that action is the best possible cure for thought, and became more actively employed than ever. She did not like to confess even to herself how much she missed Frank, though with perfect sincerity she told herself that there was nothing out of the way in the quality of her regret at his departure. She was not in love with him ; she felt sure of that, for love, according to all accounts of it, must be mixed with physical passion, and of that, as far as she knew, she felt none. She would have been completely satisfied to have had Frank for a brother ; the intimacy that close blood-relationship brings seemed to her exactly what she wanted with regard to him. But she wanted the intimacy to be as close as that, and thus it may be supposed that she was nearer than she knew to being in love with him. She indulged, however, but little in these and kindred thoughts, but very sensibly kept her mind off them by strenuous employment of hands and of brain. Here Lady Tenby was a valuable ally, for she could make for herself, so she affirmed, a busy and entrancing life alone on a desert island, even if those affairs like the building of log huts and the quest for food, which occupy so much of the time of such settlers, were taken off her hands by miraculous means. But High Beach was by no means a desert island, and it was not necessary to find occupations, but only to choose them.

To-day Lady Tenby had come to lunch, bringing with her a wheelbarrow full of gardening implements, which she trundled in front of her down the hundred yards of road that separated the two houses, for, having put her own garden to bed for the winter, and planted all the fresh roses that she intended to, she had turned her neighbourly attention to Mrs. Winthrop's plot, which she pronounced to be sorely in need of work.

“ There's a cartload of plants I can let you have,” she

said, "for all my borders have wanted thinning, and yours, you know, do want a good deal more in them. And Violet and the imps and I will plant them all ourselves, so that your gardener shan't have any more to do. You shall give me lunch, for the labourer is worthy of his victuals, and we'll have a dirty, sticky afternoon, which is just what I like."

So she had come with her big thick boots, and skirts tucked up to the knee, and gauntlets up to her elbow, wheeling her wheelbarrow with half a dozen tools along the public road to the great astonishment of the public, while her two gardeners followed with more wheelbarrows full of plants. The imps, however, who, in spite of her avowed love for children, silently and inscrutably disliked her, had altogether refused to be of the gardening party, and went out with their father instead. Polly had declined the plan with remarkable curtness when the treat was made known to her.

"We'll all mess about in the garden," Lady Tenby had said, "and make the loveliest mud-pies."

"I think," said Polly, "I shall go a walk with daddy."

"Don't you like gardening?" asked she.

"It depends. I shouldn't like gardening with you."

This abruptness quite failed to disconcert Lady Tenby, and she laughed.

"That's right, little woman," she said. "Always know your own mind."

"I always do," said Polly. "Thank you."

So Violet and she gardened alone, Lady Tenby teaching her to make really big holes in which to house the long fibres of the roots.

"Let them stretch their roots out," she said, "so that they touch as much earth as possible; don't bunch them up. Plants are just like us; they want to spread their

roots. They will never grow unless you give them room ; they will be dwarfed and flowerless. Just like us ; we have to get life all round us, touch it at as many points as possible, in order to get big brains and big hearts. And don't be afraid to stamp the earth tightly round them. They must be firmly planted, and have the earth driven close to them. Like us again ; life must clasp us hard and close, else we topple over if the wind blows."

The girl paused a moment, after driving her spade deep. "Oh, I just love that," she said. "You are so wholesome. Do go on."

Lady Tenby trod down the earth close round the stem of a rose she was putting in.

"My dear, I'm only babbling, talking to myself," she said, "but gardening makes us babble, and I think it makes our babble wholesome. You are dealing with such nice, simple things, earth and plants—plants wanting to grow, and good, moist, clean, dirty earth, so like life again. It's no use being lily-handed in this world; you ought to grub among the facts and the real things, to have one half of you buried in the rough-and-tumble among the earth and stones, pushing and nosing its way and coming sometimes across worms and creepy-crawlies that are not at all nice. But if the roots won't push and burrow, but shrink from the touch of things, the plants will never flower. There ! That's a nice home for Miss Dorothy Perkins. She'll go right up the pillar of the pergola and meet Mr. Jackmanni at the top, and I hope they'll make a match of it. She's a pushing young thing ; I think she'll bring him to reason."

Lady Tenby laughed, and stuck her fork in the earth.

"I must rest a moment," she said, "and then we'll set to again and get finished by tea. And if I'm going to survive I must have something to drink. What I should like would be a large quantity of soda and a little whisky.

Isn't that vulgar and masculine ? But I'm like Polly : I say what I think."

"Has Polly been doing that lately ?" asked Violet, who had not heard the crisp dialogue between her and Lady Tenby.

"I know it ! She told me she didn't think she would like gardening with me. Aren't children refreshing ? It is so good for one to be told that everybody doesn't like one. Else we get into a state of fatuous belief that we are popular, and it's pure waste of time to think whether one is or is not."

"Oh, but don't you like being liked ? I do. Oughtn't I to ?"

"My dear, you will be liked whether you like it or not," said Lady Tenby with her big laugh. "You may as well make up your mind to that. I'm sure Mr. Frank made some pretty speeches to you before he left. Now confess, Violet. Didn't he ask to write to you, or ask you to write to him ?"

It was a random shot, though aimed in about the right direction.

"How do you know ?" asked Violet.

Lady Tenby laughed again, as she poured some whisky they had found in the dining-room into a glass.

"Why, because he's a sensible young man. Don't you know when a boy admires you ? I used to feel it all down the back of my neck in those days when occasionally I didn't look quite hideous, in my early Victorian period."

"Well, he did ask if he might write to me about the dogs and ponies," said Violet.

Lady Tenby laughed again.

"That's their plan," she said.

"Of course I told him he mustn't. And—and—"

Violet paused a moment, finding it difficult to proceed even to this wonderful friend.

"It's dreadful to say it," she said, "but indeed you

mustn't think there was anything of—of that kind. I liked him very much, but that's quite all. And I think he liked me. But that's all."

Lady Tenby wiped her mouth on her sleeve after a vain search for a pocket-handkerchief.

"Handkerchiefs always drop," she explained, "and sometimes I dig them into the ground. Violet, my dear, I am sure you think that is all, and so no doubt it is. But it is the sort of thing that grows quietly like the plants, and one fine morning you find that it isn't all."

She paused a moment, and then laid her arm round the girl's neck. Her hand was damp and grimy, but Violet loved it being there.

"Now, my dear, I am going to talk to you like a mother," she said, "or, rather, like a sensible old grandmother. You dear child, you are so alone in the world, and there's nobody to tell you things. There are certain things you cannot guess, because a girl's education and upbringing is designed to keep her ignorant of all she ought to know. Your instinct tells you something, but you want an old woman like me, who has knocked about for years, and been a mother, with all that that implies, to tell you that your instincts are often right. Now tell me—I think you can trust me—what do you feel about Mr. Frank? Are you sorry he has gone away, are you very sorry, are you passionately sorry?"

For one moment an instinct of withdrawal possessed Violet. She felt that she did not want to be probed and examined. But the next moment she threw it from her, for there was nothing she could not tell to this splendid friend, who had so bent down to her with power of luminance and expansion. Besides, there was nothing to conceal, nothing that she wanted to keep secret.

"Yes, I was very sorry," she said—"very, very sorry. But that was quite all."

She paused a moment.

"At least I think so," she added, with a simplicity touchingly lucid.

At the moment all the possibilities of the golden uncle hardly entered Lady Tenby's head at all. She was thinking (and her thoughts were accurately translated into speech) all but sincerely concerning Violet's future, without diplomatic interest.

"Then you were quite right not to allow him to write to you," she said. "Dogs and ponies ! Tenby and I wrote to each other about postage stamps. It was in the year one, and I was eighteen, nearly as young as you. Perhaps I shall open a letter by accident, not intended for me, and find you are corresponding with Ted about mashie-shots."

But the habit of slight insincerity about small things crept in here, since the essence of habits is that they exert their force automatically. She wanted to learn something under cover of a jest. She used the jest for serious adventure. Perhaps it was no worse than Franklin flying a kite in order to ascertain big things about lightning—a child's play brought into the service of scientific investigation. The jest and the child's play, in any case, arrested Violet's attention.

"Lord Tenby ?" she said. "What do you mean ?"

The insincerity in Lady Tenby's mind was mounting. It attained real heights.

"My dear, you are a very pretty girl," she said, "and ever since pretty girls were pretty girls there have been found young men who are young men. Ted is tremendously attracted by you. Of course you know that."

She was still on sound ice, skating, it is true, but not skating in dangerous places. It was not conceivable that what she said should be repeated ; she had plenty of time to make any manœuvres she chose. She had satisfied

herself already that Violet might have fallen in love with Frank, but had not. She was satisfied next moment that she had no thought of falling in love with her son. And she, poor fool—she treated those living and sentient beings as pieces on a chessboard, thinking that she moved them about according to her will.

She had ascertained also that Frank's departure for Cairo was a complete departure, as regarded Miss Allenby, and that no communications were to pass between the two. She had no idea, for the present, how such knowledge could be useful to her, but she knew very well indeed that all knowledge, however apparently insignificant, is useful, provided you have the opportunity of using it. And even as the thought occurred to her concerning the apparent uselessness of that, she saw where it might conceivably become a practical asset, even as the light at the end of a black tunnel shows that there is day again beyond.

All this flashed through her mind instantaneously, and she laughed after her last speech without perceptible pause at the end of it. Her laugh also, to dive a little deeper into her, she had long known to be a valuable ally. Conspirators—those who are detected as such—never laughed. They watched, and in consequence were themselves watched. But if you laughed nobody looked at you, except in sympathy with your mirth. For laughter, of the jovial, boisterous sort (which Lady Tenby's was), implies enjoyment, and enjoyment leads to general disarmament, except in the case of the tactician, which Lady Tenby was.

"Of course, Ted is tremendously attracted by you, my dear," she said, "and so is his foolish old mother. I think when one gets old one loves young things more than ever. And now let us get back to our gardening. There are a dozen roses yet to put in, and we must make them com-

fortable before evening, for I should not wonder if we had a touch of frost to-night."

The girl looked up at her with those trustful, luminous eyes.

"And you will give me more talks with you?" she asked. "I—I don't think you know what it means to me to feel that I am beginning to have a friend."

Lady Tenby kissed her soundly.

"Only beginning?" she said. "But, anyhow, it is a good beginning, isn't it?"

They went back to their planting, and as far as the girl knew there was no more serious talk between them, for Lady Tenby soon led the conversation to the foolish fable of the golden uncle who, after a perfect Odyssey of surprising adventure, had discovered a blue powder which turned everything else into gold. But some of the stuff had got loose in his house, and he had not had a wink of sleep for several nights, as his sheets and blankets and pillows had all become the precious metal. Lumps of gold also had begun to appear in his bread and mutton chops, which he had to put on the side of his plate like cherry-stones. And so forth.

Lady Tenby was enchanted with it, and asked for more, but somehow the story required the pertinent interrogations and objections of the imps to give it the full flavour of absurdity. So instead she asked what started it all, what groundwork of fact lay at the base of the amazing tale, and learned of the actual existence of the uncle, how on the death of Violet's father he had offered to adopt her, how the conditions he made were impossible to accept.

"And that is positively the last you have heard of him?" she asked.

"Yes. And that is several years ago now. He said that if I did not accept his offer we should hear no more from him of any sort or kind."

"And is he married? Has he children?" asked Lady Tenby, with a piece of bass-string in her teeth as she tied a tendril of Dorothy Perkins to the pillar of the pergola.

"I don't even know that," said the girl. "He didn't say anything about them."

"How exciting! Perhaps you are the heir, for all you know. There, if Dorothy wants to meet Mr. Jackmanni at the top, she's only got to go to sleep and grow. And that's positively the lot! Well, we have done a good afternoon's work."

Lady Tenby was too hot and dirty, so she declared, to stop for tea, and, declining all assistance, went off soon after, pushing her wheelbarrow with the gardening tools in front of her. That she was revolving certain schemes and possibilities in her head it would be idle to deny, but the schemes, after all, were very pleasant ones. Violet, on her own assertion, was not in love with Frank, nor was she in correspondence with him. Ted (she had not overstated it) was tremendously attracted by the girl, and there was a chance that she might be a considerable heiress. Here were data, especially since the girl was uncommonly handsome, and a perfect darling, that should give any good mother pause for thought. Already she had done her duty by Ted to the best of her power in calling his attention to the charm of other suitable girls, but hitherto his attention had wandered very speedily. But now, for the first time, he was beginning to take notice on his own account. It was doubtful whether she should check or encourage that notice. As things stood, with Violet still but a governess in a neighbour's family, it was impossible that he should think of marrying her, but as niece of this golden uncle she could be theoretically considered in a totally different aspect.

But it was necessary, so she said to herself, as she washed and scoured, that Ted should marry a girl with

money. That did not seem to her to be a mercenary view in the least. He would not marry a girl, that is to say, for her money, but he could not marry one who had not got some considerable quantity. As it was, his country place was let, they lived very simply and inexpensively here at High Beach, and in town inhabited quite a small house in South Street. Should Ted marry imprudently, and have a family, it was really difficult to see where retrenchments sufficient for his growing expenses could be made. If that was a mercenary view, she supposed she was mercenary, but the word, justly, perhaps, as far as this went, was a misnomer.

But, as usual, she did not tell herself quite all. She left out of her account, as presented to herself, a good deal that had weight with her. Her own jointure, not a very substantial one, she cheerfully devoted to their expenses, and it would be extremely convenient to have more money than was now at her disposal. For, though she was generous with money, she liked it, and all the comfort and luxury that it commanded, and at present she had to do without a great deal that she would have liked to enjoy. Again, by birth and training she was Tory of the Tories, and thought it a very unjust affair that the descendants of those whom Providence had put a hundred years ago in a position of wealth and affluence should be obliged to vacate their big houses (manifestly intended for them to live in), let their shootings, and live in the narrower quarters which, as manifestly, were suitable to the middle class. For all these reasons Ted must marry a girl with money, and put himself again in the position he was designed to occupy.

She felt, therefore, completely justified in doing her best to make a match between any thoroughly nice and

rich girl and her son, and she would certainly have felt she was not doing her duty if she did not, to the utmost of her power, discourage him from marrying a poor one. So far things were simple, but at this point they became intricate. For the first time he was beginning to take an admiring interest in a girl who was really good enough for him, but at present unfortunately was, owing to material considerations, absolutely out of the question. On the other hand, it appeared to be well within the bounds of possibility that she might become emphatically in the question. How, then, was she to exert her influence, which she rightly knew was great both with her son and Violet? Was she to encourage their intimacy, in hopes of a speedy and favourable dispensation of Providence with regard to the golden uncle, or discourage it for fear of dealings which were not so favourable to her plan?

One other consideration gave her check: she knew Ted's simplicity, she knew also his thoroughness. If by any action or conduct of hers she encouraged him to fall in love, she would be touching a lever which controlled a force with which she could not reckon. It might be that she only helped on the "average human bliss," with its attendant circumstances; it might be that she set in motion a blind, relentless machinery that would march and crush and grind. . . .

Lady Tenby had an almost touchingly simple belief in the entire benignity of the Power that created and made the world, and it was part of her cheerful and optimistic creed that she and her concerns were the object of His very special care. If she wanted to give a picnic and the weather (as had often happened in this very dry summer) was propitious, she believed (secretly and touchingly) that it had been particularly arranged for her picnic, while if, as occasionally happened, the day was peculiarly

unpropitious, she hastily arranged some species of indoor fête, with uproarious games, and considered the weather (like Radicals and Socialists) a work of the devil, but bore it no grudge, since she had enjoyed herself so much in spite of it.

Consequently, when, that evening, Ted showed signs of the oncoming of a severe cold, she, though she was sorry for his discomfort, felt convinced that Providence was keeping him to his room for a day or two, so that she might reflect further on the very delicate problem that had presented itself. For golf and colds (he had never suffered from anything of graver nature) were the two things that Ted took really seriously, and when next morning she received a message from him that he was intending to keep his room all day, she felt sure that this was the direct answer to her petitions the night before that everything would turn out for the best. She had not gone quite so far as to pray that the golden uncle might be unmarried, intestate and moribund, because she left the details to Providence. But that was what she meant, and she didn't say it only because Providence knew. It was clearly intended (for when things suited her book she never called them accidents but intentions, nor on this occasion did it occur to her that by a more immediate process Ted had caught his cold from her) that affairs should pause for a few days, and that she was not called upon to give either encouragement or the reverse to the relations that might grow up between the two. And as that suited her book, for she was really unable to make up her mind on the subject, she saw design or intention in every sneeze Ted gave.

The poor fellow gave a good many of them during the next day or two, and in spite of his mother's shining public example, denuded the chemist's shop. It was not till the third day that he came downstairs and fetched

his putter to practise "taking it back straight" along the edge of the hearthrug.

"There's nothing that puts one's eye out so much as a cold," he said. "And it's medal day on Saturday. Well, well, one can't have everything."

Lady Tenby was always most optimistic when people were not well.

"I don't like to hear you say that, dear," she said. "At your age you ought to be certain you can have everything. You can, too, if you want enough."

"I feel a hundred," said he.

"Then your appearance belies you. Now, it's a beautiful morning, and you had much better come out for a little walk with me."

He strolled to the window; straight in front was the lawn extending to the cliff's edge, and over that the dim blue horizon of a still sea. To the left rose the roofs of Mr. Winthrop's house above the plantation of young poplars.

"I think I will," he said, to his mother's intense surprise, for usually he kept to the house for a full day after he had been in his room. "We might walk to the Winthrops', and see if they will dine with us to-night. Perhaps, even if they can't, you might ask Miss Allenby. Or is that in any way inconvenient?"

"Rather short notice, isn't it, dear?" she said, hoping that Providence had an eye to all this, and was giving it due and proper attention.

"Yes; but at the worst they won't be able to come, and there's no harm done."

Lady Tenby was suddenly filled with mistrust. This was all rather pointed, and supposing the golden uncle had a large family?

"Do you think we know Mrs. Winthrop well enough to ask them so informally?" she inquired.

"Oh, surely. Or, anyhow, you know Miss Allenby well enough to ask her informally."

His mother gave one of her great genial laughs, thinking the while.

"Well, dear, if it's Miss Allenby you want to come to dinner, why not say so?"

He looked at her a moment in silence.

"I do say so, then," he said. "Why not? I think she is charming, and I know how fond you are of her. Since we both like her, isn't that sufficient reason for asking her to dine?"

Lady Tenby felt that Providence was giving her the hand to play, when she hoped to be dummy for a little, and only look on. The only thing to do was to take the responsibility with a light heart.

"By all means," she said. "Let us go over at once."

Then she hedged, really cleverly.

"And I dare say Violet will give us news of Frank," she observed. "He is sure to have written to her to tell her if he has arrived safely and how the dogs and ponies have been."

That had the desired effect. She wanted to delay things, to give Providence a second chance of interfering in some striking manner.

It clearly checked Ted.

"They are great friends, are they not?" he said.

"Oh yes, yes," she assented cordially.

It turned out that Mrs. Winthrop had a little dinner-party that night, and therefore Miss Allenby could easily be spared. Accordingly she dined with the Tenbys, and though Ted had only left his room that morning, he went out into the cold night air to see her home again. He did not even put on a coat for this expedition, nor did he suffer from his carelessness. For he was immensely better next morning, and practised mashie-shots till lunch-time, in view of the medal round that was to take place next day.

CHAPTER VI

MR. WINTHROP was sitting on a bench outside the famous Well-house at Harrogate, with a large tumbler of steaming water in his hand. Often as he had been to this admirable health resort, he never quite got over the horror of the early-morning draught, and he held the abhorred glass out to Miss Allenby, who sat beside him.

"I only ask you to smell it," he said. "For a man with a palate——" and he shuddered.

The early local papers were on sale, and Miss Allenby bought a *Manchester Daily Mail*.

"I will read to you if that would take your attention off," she said, "but I won't smell it."

"That is no use. The Budget is inoffensive, even salutary, compared to this. So is the discovery of any amount of week-old corpses."

Miss Allenby laughed.

"Aren't you making rather a fuss?" she asked.

"Yes; I want to be pitied."

"I do pity you. But think of the imps. They both drank a tumbler full just now simply because you said they mightn't."

"But Jack was sick. And Polly would have been if her sense of pride had not prevented her."

Violet had bought a paper, and was skimming the news in case it might contain something attractive. They had been here nearly a week now, and it was hard to find topics that would by their inherent interest overcome the horror

of the waters in the mouth of Mr. Winthrop. But this morning she gave a great gasp as a small paragraph struck her eye.

“Another North Pole?” asked he, with the calmness that is bred from custom. “Make it an East or a West pole.”

“No, it’s not that,” she said quietly. “It’s—at least I think it must be—it’s my uncle.”

“The golden one?” asked Mr. Winthrop, to whom the golden uncle, owing to repeated narratives from the imps, was almost staler than the North Pole.

But Miss Allenby did not answer.

“Yes, the golden uncle,” she said. “He’s dead. I—I don’t quite understand.”

She put the paper into his hand, pointing to the paragraph. He read, swallowed his glass of water with apparent unconsciousness, and read it again.

“But, my dear Miss Allenby——” he began, and for the third time read it.

“It’s quite easy to understand,” he said.

“Is it—is it what it says?” she asked.

“Apparently. God help the next young lady who presumes to educate the imps.”

“As if I would leave the imps,” she said quickly.

Mr. Winthrop looked at his glass, surprised to find it empty.

“I seem to have finished,” he said. “Shall we walk about a little?”

They went into a small railed-in garden close to the Well-house, where a uniformed band was playing selections from the “Mikado.” The walks were dotted with those who had drunk, and the faces of those who had drunk wore a nauseated expression. Mr. Winthrop was accustomed to observe these with attention, and to feel that he carried his drink better than the general run of

these early morning tipplers. But to-day their sickness had no charm for him.

"But, my dear Miss Allenby," he said at length, "there aren't any governesses with a million and a half. There aren't such things. You can't find one. By the way, I have never congratulated you. It is immense."

The girl looked at him, and shook her head.

"But it's me just the same," she said, "if it is me that they mean. I don't change, because the golden uncle—oh, how dreadful that I should have made stories about him—because he is dead. And why wasn't he married? I thought millionaires were always married. I never imagined anything else. I never thought about it."

Mr. Winthrop saluted a perfect stranger with effusive cordiality, thinking he saw a smile. He got a perfectly blank look in exchange, and realized that his thoughts were elsewhere. It was impossible not to remember that he had told Frank that he had done a stupid thing in telling Miss Allenby that she was "awfully pretty." So he had, so he had. But Mr. Winthrop would not have called it stupid now, he would have called it cheeky. And yet, as Miss Allenby had just said, it was the same "she" as before. There was no difference really, but the illusion of an immense difference was complete. It was a false claim, as Christian Scientists would say, of the most robust kind.

Mr. Winthrop read the paragraph through even once more, but there was nothing over which a mistake was possible. Mr. John Jacob Allenby, wholesale dealer in pigs' bristles in Chicago, had died after a few hours' illness the day before. Then came a highly dramatic point. He appeared to be distressed about something, the nature of which he could not clearly indicate. Eventually, his brain clearing a little from a sort of stroke that had rendered him dumb, they gathered that he wanted to write. A sheet of paper had been brought

him, and with uncertain handwriting he had traced on it, "Everything to my niece, Violet Allenby." Doctor and nurse had duly witnessed this, and it was believed that the fortunate young lady was in England. The property was believed to amount to a sum of between one and two million sterling.

"It's really like a fairy story," he said, "of the nicest possible kind. It only remains to find a fairy prince. You may have to sit at the top of a glass hill, my dear Miss Allenby. I don't really know what my wife will say when she hears. Probably she will immediately ask you for several substantial subscriptions."

"I must tell her, I suppose," said the girl. "Oh dear, I hope she won't want me to go away at once. I've got nowhere to go; I shall be just as lonely as I was before I came to you. What am I to do? Am I to get a companion, or what? And here are the imps. Shall I tell them?"

Mr. Winthrop looked round and found they had almost mounted the slope which led to Valley Drive without his having noticed it. He still carried in his hand the massive glass tumbler out of which he had taken his first draught.

"I have only had my first glass," he said. "I shall just go back to get the second, and you might tell the imps. I don't think they'll approve."

The imps came prancing up.

We haven't picked any flowers, and we haven't been on the grass, or done anything you told us we mightn't——" began Polly.

"So will you go on with the story?" interrupted Jack.

The golden uncle had just found there wasn't room for him at the North Pole.

"Darlings, there will be no more golden uncle story ever," said Miss Allenby.

"Then I shall be naughty at once," remarked Polly. "Come on, Jack!"

"No, Polly, you won't. You will just sit down here, and I'll tell you why there won't be any more golden uncles. It's because I really had an uncle who was tremendously rich, and I've just seen in the paper that he's dead, and he's left me all his money."

"Hurrah!" said Jack. "How awfully jolly!"

But Polly saw a little farther.

"Then won't you be our governess any more?" she said.

"You dears—I don't know yet."

"I shall ask mother to give you more money," said Polly. "Then you'll stop."

"Huh! If the golden uncle's really left Miss Allenby all his money, she'll be ever so much richer than mother," said Jack. "Why, she could have Fuller's peppermints every day. Besides, if she's rich, she will buy an enormous house, and ask us to stay with her."

"That won't be so nice," said Polly decidedly. "Besides, she promised to teach me Double Dutch when I was forty. Miss Allenby dear, *don't* go away."

"You darlings! I'm not going away yet, anyhow," she said. "There's your father. Run and help to pull him up the hill as you always do."

The news had yet to be told to Mrs. Winthrop, and her husband volunteered to do this. She first said that she did not believe a word of it; next, when the probability of the paragraph's truth gained on her, she seemed rather to take it as a personal insult that Mr. John Jacob Allenby had not left the money to her, or indeed to anybody else except his niece.

"I should not in the least wonder if the will is contested," she said, "for it all sounds most irregular to me, and he must clearly have been out of his mind, to leave such a colossal sum to a mere girl who has earned her

bread all her life. And to imagine that he can have left over a million sterling is ridiculous, James. If it was dollars, I should say it was grossly exaggerated. Out of pigs' bristles, too ! Why, I could buy all the pigs' bristles I am likely to use this side of the grave with a shilling."

"Yes, my dear, but you would not buy all the bristles that the population of the United States uses for that sum."

Then, in spite of her assertion that she did not believe in the legacy at all, another aspect of the affair struck her.

"And to think of Frank sitting on the railings and calling her awfully pretty, and the way he looked at her time and again, James, I'm sure was beyond all telling. If ever a boy was in earnest he was, but I suppose it was that talking-to you gave him that put him off. Well, I'm sure I'm glad it was not my fault this time, though I should not be in the least surprised to hear you say that it was."

Certainly she ought not to have been surprised, considering the facts of the case, but Mr. Winthrop never troubled to rub in truths that were perfectly well known to his wife, although she indignantly affirmed the contrary. Nor had he time to, for she swept on.

"You might have been sure that there was something in the story," she said, "for Miss Allenby is not the girl to invent things. And where I shall get another governess from I don't know, because, with all her faults, I will say that she kept the children in order. But I suppose she'll want to be off now after breakfast as likely as not, and leave us in the lurch. To be sure, she could take a special to London without feeling it, where some designing person, I have no doubt, will get hold of her and marry her to a son, or spend all her fortune for her, for I am sure there are people in this world who would

stick at no meanness or trickery to command a fortune like that. What does it work out at in dividends, I wonder, at four per cent., and I am told you can get more than that in America."

Mr. Winthrop had begun counting the contradictions contained in his wife's remarks, but he had failed to keep pace with them.

"Anyhow, Frank has not shown himself mercenary," she proceeded, as if her husband had done so.

He gave this remark his best attention, but vainly.

"I see neither connection nor meaning in what you have said, my dear," he answered.

Mrs. Winthrop poured out from a jug on the table the remainder of her morning draught of Harrogate water. Though quite well already, it was a clear waste of opportunities, since she had to be at these detested springs with her husband, not to partake of their admirable qualities, and she had a jug brought up to her room every morning to save time, and she drank it as she wrote her letters. It filled the room, it is true, with a faint, fœtid odour, but she despised trifling inconveniences.

She drank it with the quick swallowing action that is advisable in dealing with these obnoxious fluids, and an involuntary shudder passed through her, which made her words tremble.

"There's connection and meaning enough for anyone who troubles to look for it, James," she said, "but that was always your way, especially if things did not turn out as you wished, owing to some mistake of your own. A little encouragement and fatherly sympathy from you, and no doubt by this time poor Frank would have been engaged to as nice a girl as ever stepped, and if you think it's the money that's in my mind, all I can say is that you are judging me by standards which I know nothing of. I'm sure I've got enough to do without being

misunderstood on the top of it all by one who ought to know me better, and as the breakfast bell has sounded ten minutes ago, perhaps you had better postpone anything else you have got to say against me till afterwards, when I have finished my letters. I only beg you not to speak in the way you have been doing to me before Miss Allenby and the children, or I might forget myself, and answer you back."

This was a little too much for even Mr. Winthrop's habitual serenity.

"Minnie, my dear," he said, "you're making a fool of yourself, for you know quite well I've scarcely opened my lips since I came in. It's you who have done all the talking, and you know that as well as I do. And since you've given me so much advice, I'll venture to give you some. You say Miss Allenby's as nice a girl as ever stepped. That's quite true, so try to be a little more cordial to her about her good fortune than you've been to me. There, my dear! Now give me your good-morning kiss, and we'll go in to breakfast. And, for goodness' sake, my dear, don't talk to the girl as if she was going off after breakfast and leaving you in the lurch, and such nonsense. That's all right, then."

Mrs. Winthrop had a perfect torrent of words ready to pour from her, but, as always happened, when her husband took the trouble to say quite distinctly what was to be done, she found herself doing it. She brought her face for a moment in contact with his (this was the good-morning kiss), and threw the window wider open, to get rid of the abominable smell.

"Of course I shall congratulate Miss Allenby," she said, "though I should fail in my duty to her if I did not tell her what a responsibility great riches are, and how seldom they bring happiness. But I'm sure I rejoice

at her good fortune, and I'm glad her uncle did his duty by her at the last."

This was a handsome declaration, and she was as good as her word. She was touched, also, as far as so robust a nature could be touched, by Violet's answer when she alluded to future plans.

"But please don't make me make future plans yet, dear Mrs. Winthrop," said the girl. "Of course, I suppose I shall have to do something else now, but do let me go on with the imps for the present, without thinking what is going to happen to me. They like me, I think, and I know I love them. I mean——"

A servant with a telegram came into the room, and handed it to the girl. But she sat with it unopened in her hands, "thinking out her thought."

"I mean that if you weren't otherwise going to have given me notice," she said, "please don't do it just because of this, but let me go on exactly as before for the present. You've got all your lists and circulars for the winter still not finished, and the imps have begun their lessons again, and it would be a pity to interrupt them. And, you see—I've got nowhere to go."

Mrs. Winthrop was touched, as has been said, by this appeal. It gave her also an admirable opportunity for letting off several first-class sentiments.

"No, my dear," she said, "and you would find that if you had come into a thousand millions pounds instead of one—and I should be quite prepared if I were you to find out that they were only dollars, and much exaggerated at that—you would not have made one friend the more. Money (that was the first thing I thought of when I heard the news)—money does not make happiness, and riches do not bring content. Meantime, when we get home, which we shall do, I suppose, next week, for Mr. Winthrop, I'm sure, is as free from acidity as he's ever

been, I hope you will make your home with us for just as long as it suits you. I expect there will be a lot of business to go through, which I should be glad to help you with, and I recommend you not to sign anything your lawyers tell you to sign without seeing what it's about. And if you would help me sometimes with my work, and give the children their lessons occasionally, I'm sure I shall be very grateful. Your salary, of course, will go on as usual. I could not *think* of cutting off that."

Violet shook hands with her.

"That is nice of you," she said, "and as for the salary, please give it to the Children's Fortnight Fund. And as it's eleven, I must go to the imps for their reading lesson."

Up till this moment Miss Allenby had forgotten about the telegram which had arrived for her, and now, as she left the room, she opened and read it. It was just a short word of congratulation from Lady Tenby, who had seen the news in the morning paper, and asked for further information. But the moment she read it, an idea, wonderful, delightful, perhaps possible, entered her mind. Any accomplishment of it was quite remote as yet, but perhaps it was within the bounds of possibility. . . .

Mr. Winthrop, at Violet's request, had written to his own solicitors to communicate with the golden uncle's business men in America, and by the time the family got to Bracebridge the following week Violet was in the middle of the laborious formalities connected with her inheritance. It was all very well for Mrs. Winthrop to advise her not to believe a word her lawyers said, but it seemed rather as if these incredulous gentlemen in America had been warned not to believe a word she said, and she had to prove by sworn affidavits and copies of the register of her birth, and her father's marriage, and her

uncle's birth, and her father's birth, all made before somebody who swore that such copies were duly made in his presence, while witnesses had to swear that they were present when he swore that he was present, that she was indeed the person she was, niece of the golden uncle. Bracebridge, a ferrety, gossipy country town, was thrown into a state of the most violent excitement at the news, and Violet was asked out to seven dinner-parties during the first twenty-four hours that she was back, having never previously been asked out to any dinner-party at all during the six months she had already spent there. "Though, had we known," as Mrs. Bywater said to Mrs. Winthrop, on whom she hastened to call the day after the arrival from Harrogate, "that Miss—let me see—Miss Allenby had such expectations, I should certainly have called on her at once, and I have no doubt now that I shall find her most agreeable and ladylike."

Mrs. Bywater had not meant to put it exactly that way, but the sentence expressed both her sentiments and those of Bracebridge generally quite accurately enough, and half the town called during the next day or two, leaving no longer cards for Mr. and Mrs. Winthrop only, but gratifying tokens of the recognition of her existence for Violet likewise. It was generally felt that she would not be likely to remain long in her position of governess, and it was therefore necessary to make her acquaintance as speedily as possible. Millionaires were not by any means common in Bracebridge (especially young, unmarried, female ones), and it was only natural that the town should make the most of her.

Mrs. Bywater had had the good fortune to be the first to know that the Winthrops had come back, because she accidentally met Mrs. Winthrop's kitchen-maid, who had once been in her service, in the town the morning after their arrival; and she drove off in her new motor, which

had caused some very sharp things to be said about ostentation and display, immediately after lunch. She had not the good fortune to find Miss Allenby in, for Violet had already gone out for a walk with the imps, but it was something to be able to call on Mrs. Jesson, her sister-in-law, and Mrs. Pole and Mrs. Martin afterwards, to tell them that she had been.

“I’m sure, my dear,” she said to her sister-in-law, “no one has less respect for wealth in itself than I, and if any-one was to tell me I was going to inherit two million pounds to-morrow——”

Mrs. Jesson held her hands up.

“Two million pounds!” she said. “Why, I only heard that it was one million; even that was enough to make me drop the flower-vase I was washing out.”

“Two millions, my dear—I forget what I was saying. But it’s of no consequence. Ah, yes, I do not respect wealth in itself, but such wealth as that puts Miss Allenby in another sphere, and I have no doubt that if she bought some place near, and went to live there, she would be considered ‘county’ to-morrow.”

“You didn’t see her?” asked Mrs. Jesson.

“No; but I saw Mrs. Winthrop, and it is all true. And I am sure Miss Allenby must be a very nice girl, because she asked to be allowed to stop on as Mrs. Winthrop’s governess for the present, until the future was settled. So I, for one, shall certainly ask her to dine *chez moi*. I have often thought before of doing so, but somehow the opportunity never seemed to come.”

“But is she accustomed, do you think, to that sort of thing?” asked the more cautious Mrs. Jesson. “Do you think she will know how to manage her napkin and her fish-knife?”

“I am sure she will soon learn. And if she makes any little *gaucherie*”—Mrs. Bywater was accustomed to put

French words into her conversation as naturally as possible, for she had once spent a fortnight at Dieppe—“I shall make a point of not noticing it. Dear me, there was a very pretty story of the dear Queen which I read somewhere, how an explorer, or somebody not quite *comme il faut*, dined with her, and put the ice into his soup. So the Queen did the same, to put him at his ease.”

“What taste! What tact!” sighed Mrs. Jesson. “But I think I have heard it said that Miss Allenby often dines down when the Winthrops are alone, so perhaps she knows the ways of higher life. I am very grateful to you, Janet, for having told me they are back, and I shall certainly call this afternoon. One cannot be too prompt. I should like it to be known that Miss Allenby made her début in the world among our set.”

“That is what I thought, and who knows that she may not settle down in Bracebridge, or, at any rate, have a little *pied-à-terre* here. I wonder if she plays Bridge, because I am getting up a Bridge-party—at least, I easily could—next Saturday night, and I would ask her then.

Mrs. Bywater paid two or three more calls of a similar nature on other members of her “set,” and, having started so early after lunch, it was still not nearly tea-time when she had finished. So she motored swiftly out along the Cheriton Road, which was a favourite walk, on the chance of meeting Miss Allenby and the imps, full of excitement mingled with regrets that her eldest son Anthony was still only eleven years old, and it was barely possible that Miss Allenby should wait for so many years as must elapse before he was of marriageable age. But she felt she would expire with baffled rage if Miss Allenby married that dreadful Arthur Saddler, who, owing to the glamour of the stage (he had once been on tour with a London company in the provinces), was quite the most destructive heart-breaker in Bracebridge. He was tall and bony, and

wore a taking eyeglass, and Mrs. Bywater and Mrs. Saddler, his mother, did not "visit." Indeed, Mrs. Saddler was supposed to have said she did not know Mrs. Bywater, which, reaching Mrs. Bywater's ears by the tact of a mutual friend, was the cause of that lady cutting the fallacious Mrs. Saddler at the last charity bazaar.

Fortune, as usual, favoured the enterprising, and she had hardly gone a mile along the Cheriton Road when her eager glance caught sight of Miss Allenby and the imps. At least Mrs. Bywater knew the imps by sight, and a moment's reflection of her powerful brain deduced the fact that their companion must be Miss Allenby, since she had been told that she was out with them. And she caused the motor to be stopped with mathematical precision opposite them.

"My dear Miss Allenby," she said, "you must allow me to congratulate you—Mrs. Bywater, you know, and a great friend of dear Mrs. Winthrop's. I assure you all Bracebridge rejoices with you."

At the moment, but only for the moment, Mrs. Bywater stiffened in silence, as if she was a stuffed specimen of a woman, for a carriage driving by in the opposite direction proved to contain Mrs. Saddler. Then she beamed again, having performed what was not only a duty but a pleasure.

"And so you are out for a walk with the dear children," she continued. "Will you not all get in, and take a drive with me. I will drop you at your house."

"Would you like to, Polly?" asked Violet.

"No," said Polly, "I shouldn't."

"Polly!"

"No, thank you, Miss Allenby," said Polly, pointedly ignoring Mrs. Bywater.

This was all very distressing and embarrassing, and Jack joined it.

"Nor should I," he said. "Who is she?"

Miss Allenby turned to Mrs. Bywater.

"It's very kind of you," she said, "but I think we'll walk. The children are rather hot."

"O-oh!" said Polly.

"Polly, be quiet. Medes and Persians! But thank you so much."

The motor drove on, and Violet had to remonstrate.

"Polly, Jack, you are both very rude," she said.

"What made you behave like that?"

"'Cause I didn't like her," said Polly. "She only asked us to drive because of your golden uncle."

Jack skipped wildly about.

"I guessed too," he shrieked. "We both guessed. She wanted you to tip her."

"Miss Allenby wasn't such a goose," said Polly, with strong approval. "How much do you think she wanted, Miss Allenby?"

"Be quiet, you little fiends," remarked Violet. "As I was saying——"

The imps closed up again, each possessing themselves of a hand.

Indeed, it did rather seem that the inhabitants of Bracebridge in general, to use Jack's compendious phrase, "wanted tipping," and their naïve eagerness to put themselves in evidence gave constant delight to Mr. Winthrop, who observed what he called "the autumn manœuvres" with an appreciative eye, and made constant journeys to the table in the hall to see who had called. Invitations, as well as those agreeable little pieces of pasteboard, flowed in, not only from the Bywater-Jesson stratum of society, which consisted mainly of solicitors, coroners, and architects, and the sons of those who had been tradesmen in the town a generation ago, but from the austere and exalted

hostesses of the Saddler group, who lived at the top of the hill, and whose husbands were largely retired naval and military men, who wrangled together in the County Club. Miss Allenby, in fact, shed lustre even upon the Winthrops themselves, for Mrs. Saddler, who was very proud, and often said she did not care to mix much in the society of the town, though she was sure there were a quantity of very civil, well-meaning people there, came and called the next day—Roman nose, and pug-dog, and liveried coachman, and all—bringing the histrionic heart-smasher with her, who put his eyeglass in his eye, leaned on the corner of the chimneypiece in attitude of William Shakespeare, and told Mrs. Winthrop several of the latest stories from town, which were of so lively a description that his mother had to ask him how he could be so naughty.

Of course, Mrs. Saddler, owing to her general superiority (for her husband was a General, and her father had been an Honourable, and her son was the beau of Bracebridge), was not so direct in her methods as Mrs. Bywater, and since Miss Allenby did not appear in the drawing-room (she was playing Tom Tiddler's ground in the garden with the imps), she let it appear that she had merely come to pay a call on Mrs. Winthrop, and talked about promotion, and prevention, and High Beach, and Harrogate, in the most natural manner possible. Indeed, she had quite finished tea, and had already told the beau that they must be thinking of going, before she let it appear that she even knew of Miss Allenby's existence. It was, in fact, Mr. Winthrop who introduced her name, for, having sacrificed half an hour of the time when he might have been playing Patience to the higher delights of observing Mrs. Saddler's manœuvres, he could not bear that she should go away (there seemed to him at the moment a risk of that) without any fun at all. And at the mention of Miss Allenby, the cork, so to speak, came out of Mrs.

Saddler's curiosity, which had been carefully bottled up, with a pop.

"Such a strange coincidence," she said. "I happened to glance at the *Daily Mail* the other day, and saw that a Mr. Allenby had died, leaving a fortune to his niece. Now, dear Mr. Winthrop, you know what a gossipy place Bracebridge is"—he did—"and how difficult it is to keep altogether from hearing all the talk which goes on—little as one likes it. Well, I am told Bracebridge says that the niece is your Miss Allenby. Another tells me that Captain Clayton said so at the club, and so there might be something in it, for Captain Clayton is quite one of us."

That was a giddy moment for Mr. Winthrop, for he appreciated the shades of the society of Bracebridge, and knew quite well that, though he and his wife were of sufficiently reputable standing, they were not quite, quite of the Saddler-Clayton group. But now Mrs. Saddler spoke to him as "one of us." That was Miss Allenby's doing ; they were being hoisted into prominence on the governess's shoulders !

"Yes, it is quite true that Miss Allenby's uncle died the other day, and left her quite—quite a little fortune," said he. This was in the true Bracebridge style, where the best people (not the Bywaters and Jessons) only alluded to money vaguely, and without vulgar detail.

Arthur hastened to the end of another of his famous town stories, and without even waiting to see whether Mrs. Winthrop was shocked or amused, turned his attention to his mother and Mr. Winthrop, on the mention of this. Not for nothing had the beau of Bracebridge put on his newest suit, his purple tie with an amethyst pin to match, and purple socks to match his tie. He was almost afraid he was too smart ; Miss Allenby might be blinded by the over-excess of splendour. At present she had not been, since she had not beheld these things.

“ How nice for her ! ” said Mrs. Saddler. “ For I’m sure I often think how dreadful it must be for poor governesses, who, I dare say, are quite well bred, having to look forward to an old age unprovided for except by their little savings. Quite a little fortune, was it ? There were figures mentioned in the *Daily Mail*, but no doubt there was some exaggeration. What figure was it you saw mentioned, Arthur ? ”

“ A million and a half you told me, mamma.”

“ That would be dollars, no doubt, Mr. Winthrop,” said she. “ Still, a very handsome sum, though I am sure I can never recollect exactly what a dollar is.”

Mr. Winthrop could not resist playing up to this.

“ Was it dollars, Minnie ? ” he asked his wife.

“ No, dear, pounds—pounds sterling. Rather over a million and a half, Miss Allenby told me this morning.”

“ Dear me ! What a responsibility for a girl ! Quite a fortune, is it not ? I recollect so well seeing her in church one day, so tall and handsome ; and as for Arthur, he could not keep his eyes off her, and I couldn’t blame him. And your son, is he at home now ? ”

“ No ; Frank went back to Egypt a fortnight ago.”

“ How interesting for him ! How it must take one back to be living in sight of the Pyramids, and thinking how long ago it all was ! But I’m sure the climate in Egypt could not be more delightful than it is here. We were playing croquet all afternoon yesterday, and on Saturday we were thinking of having a little lawn-tennis party— ”

Mr. Winthrop could barely check himself from saying “ I thought so.”

“ I don’t know if you play, Mrs. Winthrop,” she said ; “ but even if not, I hope you and your husband will come, and sit and have a talk. Perhaps Miss Allenby plays. If she hasn’t got a racket, I’m sure we could find one

for her. I wonder if you would give her my invitation, if you think she will excuse the informality of it ? It is no party, really ; just a few friends coming in."

Arthur, meanwhile, had seen a framed photograph of a girl on the table, and as he rose darted to it, adjusting his eyeglass, under the impression that it was Miss Allenby. He looked, and handed it to his mother.

" Yes, certainly, very handsome," said she.

Mr. Winthrop gave a little cough.

" That is a photograph of my niece," he observed.

The honour of the lawn-tennis party, however, was one among many honours which Miss Allenby was obliged to decline, since she had to go up the day before to town, for the purpose of seeing her man of business, and finishing up the formalities connected with her inheritance. Certain of the property was to be sold in order to meet the death-duties ; so also was the golden uncle's house and effects in Chicago, for she did not intend to reside in that town. Her sanction was necessary for certain of these businesses, her signature for others, and a couple of days, it was hoped, would be sufficient for the completion of these affairs. She was to remain in town, however, for a few days more, staying with Lady Tenby, who had just come up from High Beach to settle in London for the autumn and winter. Ted, so a letter she had received from that lady a day or two before informed her, was still at High Beach, where he had a couple of men staying with him, and was devoting the entire day to golf. So Lady Tenby, as Ted was comfortable, and the garden put to bed, thought she might as well be out of the way, and had come up to town. Town was delightful in October ; you could do what you liked, and there was no fuss or bother, and all the theatres were opening again, and everything

was very cheery and comfortable. Also, she was much looking forward to Violet's visit.

Violet was looking forward to it no less, for she longed to see her friend again, and talk over her plans—or, rather, invent them with her.

It was, of course, clearly out of the question to continue in her present position, and, though the imps were darlings, and Mr. Winthrop a dear, she did not want to. She had the golden key which, though it cannot stir the wards of the lock which opens the door of happiness, unlocks so much that is pleasant in life. She was young, keen, alert, eager to enjoy, and—it would have been unnatural if it had not been so—ready to begin. The world did not seem to her at all a vale of tears, nor did gold seem to her dross, and, having got to believe now (for at first the whole affair had seemed to her incredible and unreal) that she was an heiress of great wealth, and that all that can reasonably minister to pleasure was within her reach, she looked forward with tremendous zest to the future. And not less did she look forward to consulting Lady Tenby about it. She had written Violet the most delightful letter on the heels of her telegram, full of boisterous delight at her good fortune—delight so sympathetic that Violet felt that Lady Tenby was even more excited and pleased than herself. Only Lady Tenby could have written it.

Decidedly it was, as Lady Tenby said, the most enormous fun. Even in the smallest ways, in things that would so soon become commonplace and unnoticed by Violet, it was fun. It was fun going to the station at Bracebridge in a fly, instead of stopping the hotel bus; it was fun buying a six-shilling book at the bookstall to read in the train; it was fun going first-class (though that seemed almost a waste of money, however much money there was); it was fun tipping the porter a shilling,

instead of threepence ; it was fun going in a taxi-cab, and not caring how quickly the twopences clicked on the dial. And the best fun of all was to arrive at the house in South Street, and hear Lady Tenby call, "Violet, my dear !" as she ran downstairs to meet her. But that was more than fun ; it was among those things which no money could buy.

"Of all the delightful things to happen," she cried, kissing her again and again, "it is the best ! It's no use my pretending to be so lofty and refined as to despise money. Come upstairs at once, Violet, and have tea."

"One moment ; I haven't paid my cab."

Lady Tenby gave a great shout of laughter.

"That you shall do," she said. "I wouldn't pay a cab for you if you were to beg me to. I shall charge you for board and lodging, too, I think. My dear, it is nice to see you again. High Beach was dreadfully dull after you and the imps left. And you have been at Bracebridge since Harrogate. Wild excitement, I suppose ?"

"Everyone was very kind," began Violet ; and then the thought of the invitations and cards was too much for her, and she laughed.

"People were too funny for anything," she said. "Oh, I hope it's not unkind of me to laugh ! But it was too obvious for words. They all asked me to dinner, and lunch, and tennis-parties."

"The ducks !" said Lady Tenby.

"They were—just ducks. It didn't matter whether they had seen me before or not. They came tumbling over each other, saying 'Quack, quack !' They were coming to be fed. But it was a little vulgar of them, wasn't it ?"

"No, quite natural," said Lady Tenby ; "but they are ducks all the same. A very rich girl can do things for them, and marry their sons, one at a time. Of course they made themselves pleasant."

There was the difference, and to Violet it was all the difference in the world to know that here at last was somebody who did not want anything done for her, who gave her exactly the same welcome and warmth as before. The girl could not help recalling to her mind how Mrs. Saddler had brought that dreadful son to call, and how the dreadful son had called again next day, while in this case Lord Tenby remained at High Beach.

"Jack said they wanted tipping," she said. "The imps were delicious about it. They frankly objected to what has happened, because they guessed that I should not stop with them. Oh, isn't that worth anything else? They liked me, the darlings, because it was me!"

"Ah, yes, my dear; compared with that, gold is dross. But considered in itself it isn't in the least. It's immense fun. Oh, Violet, where and how are you going to begin? Tell me all your plans. I'm sure you must have made up plans as fantastic and real as any fairy-story you ever told the imps."

"Fantastic and real?" asked Violet.

"Yes; there are some people, and you are certainly one, who don't belong to the ordinary run of humanity at all, and things happen to them that happen to nobody else. Whoever heard of a girl as beautiful as you—oh, my dear, don't look as if you would rather I didn't say that, because the sooner you get used to it now, the better—"

Violet made a little gesture of bewilderment.

"The sooner I get used to it *now*, the better?" she said.

"Yes, dear. It isn't good form to tell a governess she is pretty—at least, I suppose a tutor might—but it's even bad form not to tell an heiress she is. Don't interrupt me. Whoever heard of a girl, I was saying, as beautiful as you being a governess at all? And whoever

heard of a governess suddenly coming into a vast fortune ? You're not an ordinary person ; you're a fairy princess ; you're like one of the people in your own stories. You haven't got a father or mother, or any relation, you poor darling ! I fully believe you made yourself up, invented yourself. Well, you are an enchanting invention, and I want you to tell me all about the next chapter. All I ask you is not to spread your wings—I'm sure you've got wings covered with silver stars—and fly away. It would be as dull for us as it is for children who have been to see the pantomime when the curtain comes down, and nurse tows them out into the foggy, muddy streets again."

Violet laughed.

" Ah, it is you who are being fantastic !" she said ; " though, thank goodness ! you are real. That's the trouble with me, you see : I have got so few things that are real. You and the Winthrops—that is about all. And now I suppose the Winthrops will get less real. It can't be helped. I can't go on being governess to those dear imps, and I can't live at Bracebridge. At least, wouldn't it be foolish of me ? As this has happened, I may as well make the best of it, and it wouldn't be making the best of it to buy a house there, and solemnly inhabit it."

The possibility with regard to the future which Violet had thought of filled her mind now, and she looked shyly, wistfully, at Lady Tenby, as if to catch the faintest indication that it had entered her mind too. Probably, so she told herself, it was the wildest of day-dreams. And at present she could detect no reflection of her day-dream there.

" Of course, that is the most important and difficult thing of all to settle," she said. " You can take your motor-cars, and your travelling, and your jewels, and your dresses, and your splendid fun, for granted. But where

are you going to make your home ? Where is the nest to be ? Of course, some man will arrange a nest for you before long, and in anticipation I say, God bless him ! But unless you have arranged all that already, and not told me about it——”

“ Ah, how likely !” said Violet.

“ Well, if you haven’t, there is the interval to be provided for. Of course, you can’t live at Bracebridge. Have you made no plan yet ? I am a little disappointed. That is such an important part of the story which I wanted you to tell me.”

“ I’ve no idea,” said Violet. “ Can’t—can’t you make any proposition ?”

She got up and stood for a moment by the window, looking out. It was growing dusk, a gusty rain that was falling made the streets appear extraordinarily dismal and inhospitable, and she turned back into the room again with a little shiver. How great was the contrast ! A fire burned briskly in the hearth, the room was full of brightness and warmth, and all spoke of home and welcome. And by the fire sat the woman she was so much devoted to.

“ I can’t pretend to guide you,” said Lady Tenby, after a pause. “ I can only suggest things for your consideration. I always think a girl living alone is rather pathetic. So—what if you came to live with me ?”

The girl came one step nearer.

“ Oh, is it possible ?” she said. “ I—I would try so hard not to be tiresome. I had thought of it, but did not dare——”

Lady Tenby gave a great laugh, and held out her arms to her.

“ My dear, had you thought of that ?” she said. “ Why, it’s the nicest thing that could happen. At least, that’s my view. So welcome home, dear Violet.”

CHAPTER VII

VIOLET was sitting at the telephone in Lady Tenby's room, tapping the table rather impatiently with her fingers. Aunt Maggie—some relationship had to be made for purposes of speech, since "Lady Tenby" was impossible to keep up, and aunt was a very nice relationship—Aunt Maggie was looking at some architect's plans which Violet had just brought her.

"I think that some of the additions are perfectly unnecessary," she was saying. "Of course, you want a sitting-room at High Beach, but another one for me is quite ridiculous. I won't sit in it, you darling, if you do have it built."

At the moment the telephone bell rang.

"One minute, Aunt Maggie," said the girl, "and then I'll go on quarrelling with you. Is that the Haymarket Box office? I want three stalls for to-night, please. Yes, Miss Allenby, 93, South Street. Only in the back row? Oh! Yes, certainly. It will hold three quite comfortably, will it? Yes, Miss Allenby. Thank you."

"Violet, have you taken the stage-box again?"

"Yes, dear. You can't see anything from those back rows. Oh, and may I ring the bell and order dinner early? Cousin Ted said he would get back by six, so we can dine at a quarter to seven. Now, about the plans: If you can do without a sitting-room of your own, so can I. But I think it would be much nicer to have one. That being so, why not have two more bedrooms? I

know quite well that you often wanted more rooms last year. Besides, it's my birthday present to you, and so I don't want to hear any more about it. And if you won't sit in your nice new sitting-room, I shall throw myself out of its window."

"You darling ! I give up. But do you know what to-day is ? It's December the eighth, and you have been here a month. And as we settled to give each other a month's trial, and see if we suited——"

Violet laughed. "Do I suit ?" she said, sitting down on the floor, and rolling up the plans. "Break it gently to me, please, Aunt Maggie."

"I will try to, dear. I am sure you have done your best to give satisfaction, but I am afraid I can't keep you. It is only fair to give you reasons, and the real defect I find in you is that you are so utterly selfish, and never think about anyone but yourself. Then you are frightfully conceited, and a positive miser."

"Oh !" said Violet, with a broad smile.

"So if you could arrange to go to-day——"

"Well, then, I can't. I'm going to stop here for ever instead."

She tossed the plans on to the table, and suddenly became serious.

"A month to-day, is it ?" she said. "I grudge every day of it. I wonder if you guess what you have been to me."

"I have been your ugly old aunt," said Lady Tenby; with decision.

"Well, please go on being my ugly old aunt," said the girl. "Ah, here's Ted ! How did the golf go ?"

"Oh, moderate to putrid. Blenkthorn tells me we are going to dine at a quarter to seven."

"Yes ; I thought we might all go to the play. I've taken seats at the Haymarket. Or would you rather not ?"

"Delightful! And thank you so much for sending the motor down to Woking, Violet. I could never have got back otherwise."

"Come and dress, children," said Lady Tenby.

It may be gathered from this that the arrangement of this joint ménage was in every way satisfactory. It seemed to Violet that she had found again what she thought had passed from her life for ever at her mother's death in this recapture of a home, and till that priceless possession had become hers again, she did not know how much she had missed it. And though, as has been mentioned before, Lady Tenby was more distinguished by new friends than by old ones, she had up till the present lost nothing of her hold upon the girl's affection. Moreover, the sense of wealth was still new enough to Violet to be extremely entertaining. It was still fun to go first class, to have the most luxurious motor that money could buy, to have beautiful clothes in exactly such quantities as she pleased, and to order stage-boxes whenever it suited her. But better than all that, and belonging to another sphere of enjoyment, was the delight of spending money on Aunt Maggie. Aunt Maggie loved pretty things, and all her life up till now she had had to do without them to a large extent, and pretend (with admirable realism) that she did not care two straws about them. And her delight at the least little present was so enchanting; it seemed that there happened to be only one thing in the world she wanted, and that was it. Violet was wise enough also not to embarrass her with too frequent or too costly gifts. It was the giving which was so enjoyable. Her birthday, however, which had occurred two days before, was an occasion on which she might let herself go a little, and the addition to the house at High Beach was the form her felicitations had

taken. The only thing that was wanting in this respect was that, though the gifts gave much pleasure both to the giver and receiver, they did not cost the giver self-sacrifice, which is the crowning joy of giving. That was the sole weak point in this great inheritance.

Lady Tenby was equally content. She was genuinely fond of the girl, and, apart from that paramount consideration, there were minor ones which were very pleasant. She was the soul of hospitality, and an admirable hostess, and nothing pleased her so much as to see her friends eating and drinking and amusing themselves at her expense. This office, owing to the expensiveness of the delightful pleasure of hospitality, she had been only able to perform in a very limited manner, but the contribution Violet made to household expenses considerably enlarged the scale. That contribution was an extremely handsome one, for it was two thousand pounds a year, and it had required a good deal of pressure on Violet's part before she would accept so very welcome a largesse.

Lady Tenby had demurred at first to Violet's contributing anything, saying that she had not suggested her coming to live in South Street in the spirit of a landlady with "Apartments to Let," looking out for a suitable lodger. But Violet's attitude had been unwavering : she could not possibly come at all unless she was allowed to pay.

Then came the question of what the contribution should be, and Lady Tenby suggested a hundred pounds for herself and fifty for her maid. That was equally unsatisfactory to the girl.

"Oh, do be reasonable quickly!" she had said. "To begin with, you will quite certainly entertain more now I am here, because you will want me to know all sorts of

nice people. And then there is this: you are doing everything for me, giving me a home and yourself, and you make a fuss because I insist on doing the only thing I can do for you. You mustn't deprive me of that pleasure, please. I wish you would take my cheque-book and draw cheques whenever you want, but I know, if I did that, you would never draw any at all. And perhaps I shall get some friends, too, and I shall want to ask them here quite freely, if you like them. I can't do that if I am paying a hundred pounds for myself and fifty for my maid."

"Well, two hundred," said Lady Tenby.

"Oh dear! Now, about what do you suppose you spend on this house and High Beach—food, wages, rent, everything?"

"About two thousand a year."

"Well, then, I must join to that extent. I shall about double your expenses, and so I must pay half."

"But, my dear, it's out of the question!"

"Yes, Aunt Maggie, because there is no question. I have settled it. I do hate arguing so! And I shall pay the first quarter now at once."

The gift was very acceptable in itself, and Violet's joy in making it made it also possible to accept it. And if Lady Tenby was the gainer in the pleasure of the added hospitalities she could now afford, and in the relief of not having to consider and check expenses, Violet also shared in the general ease that her contribution produced, and, certainly, Lady Tenby gave her good value. The house overflowed with pleasant people, and Aunt Maggie was never tired of taking the girl out to whatever gaieties the autumn provided, enjoying them very much also herself.

But below her splendid spirits and outward *joie de vivre* there went on a good deal of careful thought and

planning. From the first Violet and Ted had been excellent friends, but as yet his mother could see no sign, in spite of her anxiety to see this, that there was coming any change over the quality of Violet's friendliness to him. Christian names and cousinship had been the natural sequel to her own adopted relationship, and sometimes she found herself wondering whether Violet was not more sisterly even than cousinly. That she liked Ted was perfectly plain ; that she did not care any more than that, she was afraid was perfectly plain also ; and Lady Tenby, knowing how strong an ally to love is constant propinquity, devoted a considerable amount of thought as to the reason for this. It was not sufficient for her to say to herself, "She does not love him because she does not love him," without first ascertaining if there was not any cause more definite and individual—the existence, in fact, of some other young man. But, though there was no doubt that Violet was making a very definite and individual impression on several other young men, Lady Tenby felt satisfied that none of those were making a corresponding impression on her. One had already proposed, and Violet had thanked him very much, declined, and instantly told Aunt Maggie about it.

But, holding the human and correct view that it is natural for a normal girl to be in love with someone, just as it is natural for a boy, Lady Tenby did not feel quite satisfied with her mental enumeration of the possible young men. Had she left one of them out, by any chance ? And then quite suddenly Frank Winthrop's name occurred to her. She wondered at her slowness in not having thought of him before, since she had talked to Violet about him in this very connection. But she had on that occasion received Violet's assurance that she was not in love with him, and that, coupled with his absence in Egypt, had banished him from her mind.

But the moment that he occurred to her she felt she was on the target. It was not that she believed Violet to be in love with him, but that he was the definite and individual cause of her not falling in love with Ted. There was a difference between the two—delicate it might be, but not fantastic or fanciful—a difference easily felt and appreciated by a woman like herself. And, in spite of his charm and his good looks, and his exceeding remoteness from London, she labelled him an inconvenient young man, but for the time she did not see how to render him less so.

With regard to Ted himself she was fairly well satisfied. He was not, of course, violently or wildly in love with the girl, chiefly because it was not probably in his nature to be violent or wild about anything, but she could see very well that Violet and the thought of her was beginning to trouble him. He was slow and deliberate in all he did, but he was remarkably thorough about whatever he took up. He was learning love exactly as he had learned golf, making continual but very gradual progress, but what he acquired was soundly acquired. He would never be lyrical ; flashing, soaring ecstasy would not be his ; but his would be the steady burning light of an inextinguishable flame. And Violet, her presence and her speech, troubled him, as his mother could see, rousing in him that sweet bewilderment that marks the early days of love. Her doings had a significance for him because they were hers, not because they were in themselves of interest. He looked at her furtively when he might have equally well done so openly ; he anticipated her wants and guessed her inclinations.

All this was done shyly and quietly, in a manner characteristic of the man, for we fall in love in the same key as that in which the rest of our life is set, and it was his to be

quiet and unselfassertive. It was characteristic, too, of him that the process was slow. Frank, for instance, could have fallen in love with half a dozen girls in less time than it took Ted to fall in love with one. The experience also, it must be remembered, was novel to him. He did not recognize those early streaks of dawn from the recollection of other dawns, and so run out, so to speak, to greet the new day. He peered at it, at first, through closed curtains, and wondered what was happening outside.

But day by day the glory grew, in spite of his indolence in emotion, and underneath the apparent content of his placid days the true lover's uncontent was daily growing keener. The romance that was beginning to awake in his heart—that which is incommunicable by any form of expression—made the rest of the pleasures of life lose their edge, so that he played golf but seldom, and even then did not care so very much whether he played well or not. Even a mashie-shot laid close to the hole failed to fill him with the surprising joy which he thought inseparable from it; even the topped drive failed to impress him with the sense of degradation that should accompany it. It has been hinted, too, that he was not unappreciative of the pleasures of the table. They, too, a little lost their savour. Never very talkative, he became markedly more silent, and fell into fits of abstraction instead of going to bed.

The month of Violet's apprenticeship as paying guest and of Lady Tenby's as paid host had just expired, and it was understood between them that they were cohabitants until such time as some stronger tie than this friendship and suitability was forged. For the last week or two Lady Tenby had been very much conscious of the growth of such feelings as have been shortly analyzed in her son. She was conscious, also, that Violet was not in a similar stage of advancement with regard to romance between

them. She suspected also—and the suspicion was already crystallized and sharp-edged in her mind—that Frank was the bar to Violet's progress. Whether the girl herself was aware of this or not she did not know. She at any rate believed that the existence of this very charming young man, though out in Egypt, was the reason for Violet not advancing along the normal lines of her sex and age, and showing signs of selection. As it was, she flew no signals. She was on excellent terms with several very eligible young men who quite certainly desired to be on more excellent terms, but she did not respond in the smallest degree to any efforts of theirs to establish a particular relation. She laughed and talked with them; she treated them in that free and intimate manner which had become the habit between boys and girls, but clearly no touch of sentiment embarrassed her. She was *bonne camarade* to everybody, even to the youth she had rejected, and appeared, as far as the world she saw was involved, to have no desire to cultivate other relations with any of them. So, referring to her own rule of the normal condition of healthy girls of twenty years of age, with any amount of eligible youths admiring her, Lady Tenby concluded that there must be some attachment of which Violet did not speak. It was almost mathematically certain that this attachment was that extremely pleasant absentee in Cairo. True, Violet had denied the fact, but her denial was quite compatible with the fact that, though it did not consciously exist in the girl's mind, it yet made a barrier against her forming relations with anyone else. In any case, so she argued to herself (and found herself easily convinced by such arguments), it was reasonable that she should be thinking of marriage. And in connection with marriage it was even more than reasonable that she should be thinking about Ted. They were excellent friends; they were brought into constant

propinquity; he was quite good-looking. Violet had shown no marked preference for anybody else, and, unless her thoughts were in Cairo, there must be somebody whom she saw and Lady Tenby saw. But for the life of her Lady Tenby could not "put a name to him," and so she voted for Cairo.

It was on a day towards the middle of December that Ted came to her room after breakfast. He was to have gone down to Sunningdale that morning to play a medal round at golf, but the denseness of the fog had rendered it very unlikely that he could catch any train with reasonable prospect of success in getting there. Violet had offered him her motor at breakfast, but in such an atmosphere motors were as snail-like as any other means of locomotion, and he had decided to give it up. The wisdom of his choice was soon endorsed, for the fog, which had been bad at breakfast, became rapidly worse, and at ten o'clock windows which should have been the ingress of light were black, unluminous panes, and all the light they admitted was the blurred moon of a gas-lamp on the opposite side of the street.

Lady Tenby was never too busy to attend to the social requirements of her immediate circle, and she cheerfully shut up that particular volume of the "household book" which she was looking at in order to give her mind to her son. He had come into her room; therefore he was seeking her society, and he could not have that if she concerned herself with quails and turbot. There were a good many quails.

"It is bad luck for you, dear," she said, "having this dreadful fog on the medal day, for you were playing so well, weren't you?"

"Oh, golf?" he asked. "I don't know how it is, but it doesn't seem to matter much. I think I shan't play from town any more. It is rather a business getting

down, and even when you get there it's only flogging a silly little ball for two or three miles."

This from him was rank blasphemy, and a little while ago he would have himself wondered whether he ought not to be burned for it. As a matter of fact, he was being burned for it in another fire, which hitherto had been a slow one. Now it was beginning to blaze.

"The fact of the matter is——" he began, and stopped.
"The fact——" he began again.

"Darling, we got farther than that the first time," said she.

"Oh, damn!" said Ted.

The flocks of quails that apparently had alighted in the kitchen of the house were completely expunged from Lady Tenby's mind, though a few minutes ago she had been horrified at them. She weighed the silver of speech against the gold of silence, and made an alloy of them. She said only a very few words.

"Tell me what's the matter, my dear."

For nearly a minute—a long time when time is being waited on—he continued to shuffle up and down the hearthrug, an unusual thing for him, who usually was the least restless of mankind.

"I want Violet," he said. "I suppose I love her. It's devilish awkward."

The speech was not romantic, for he had no practice in the expression of romance, but it was downright practical and sincere. Why he found this state of things awkward was more ambiguous. But there are certain sorts of minds not always—and, indeed, not usually—of first-rate calibre (and Lady Tenby's was one of those), which are capable of really remarkable acrobatic feats. They are minds capable of cunning rather than wisdom, but they are often very agile, and leap into what appears to be the dark, with certainty of finding their perch. She under-

stood at once in what the awkwardness consisted ; knew it was not because he found his golf without allure to him, as a less agile mind might have supposed.

“ Awkward, because she has been living with us ?” asked his mother.

“ Yes ; it isn’t of myself I’m thinking, but of you. There are people who will say that you took her to live with us in order that I might marry her. It’s really only of you that I am thinking, mother.”

She got up and gave him a great resounding kiss.

“ God bless you, my darling !” she said. “ I know that, and it’s like you to think of me. But you can banish all that at once from your dear old head. In the first place, it cannot possibly matter to me or you what people think, if they think that. Malice always defeats itself by being malicious, and if there’s any woman in London who would say that, you may be quite sure that she would have liked Violet to live with her for the species of reason she attributes to me. She expresses the same thing in other words by saying that of me. Surely we can dismiss all that. Now, my dear, I can’t tell you how delighted I am, and how proud that you have told me. We women love being told things ; we love to think our children trust us. Now, have you said anything at all to Violet ?”

“ No ; I had to talk to you first. I had to make sure that I didn’t put you into a false position, or take—take any undue advantage. It seemed to me possible that the very fact of Violet’s living here precluded me, not from falling in love with her, because I suppose I couldn’t help that, but from ever proposing to her.

Lady Tenby was half impatient and amused, half envious of the spirit that inspired this speech. She was impatient and amused because this seemed to her a ridiculous piece of quixotism — a quality of which she had no personal experience. But she was envious, also,

in some more remote region of her brain, because she knew that this quixotism sprang from a certain delicacy and fineness of honour which was wholly admirable. It was out of place if you like, in a world where it paid to scheme and plot until what you wanted was within reach, and then to grab it ; but she realized there were those who did not scheme and grab, and of these she was vaguely jealous. She did not see why other people should have been given perceptions which were not granted to her.

But she kept out of her speech all echo of these feelings, and was only sympathetic.

“ My dear, it precludes you from nothing of the sort,” she said, “ though it was, oh, so like you to wonder whether it did. Ah, Ted ! may your love prosper, dear ! and may it run very smooth, as true love so often does, on purpose to contradict the proverb ! Now, do you want advice or counsel, Ted ? If you do, I shall be delighted to give you the best I can. If you don’t, I shall be equally delighted just to watch—yes, my dear, and pray, too.”

“ You would like it very much ? ” asked he.

“ There is nothing in the world that I could like more,” she said. “ Literally that. If I might choose any gift that God could give me, it would be a wife for you. And if I could choose who that wife should be, I would choose Violet. You know how devoted I am to her, and what devoted friendship—I assure you it is so—she feels for me. Well, my dear, when the other person concerned is you, could there be anything under the sun I could desire more ? I can’t imagine anything.”

All this was perfectly true ; she was not overstating it at all. But while she spoke she was thinking also very intently.

“ Violet has gone out,” she said, “ in spite of, or rather because of, the fog. It is the first real fog, she tells me, she has ever been in, and she finds it so mysterious and

exciting that she has gone out to play hide-and-seek all by herself. So she will not disturb us ; we can talk. Now, may I advise you, since you wish me to—not to say anything to her just yet ? Her feeling towards the whole world is just like her feeling towards the fog. She is having her first glimpse of it, and finds it tremendously exciting. She has not been paying any attention at all to herself, nor thinking what it means to her. She has been living and looking at it all like a child at a pantomime. If you said anything to her just now, I think you would only startle her, and distress her a little."

" Why distress her ?" he asked.

" My dear, because she is so fond of you. There isn't a man in London whom she likes as she likes you. I am sure of that. And she will continue to like you : her liking will grow. I think I may say I am sure of that also. But supposing you asked her now to be your wife, I think she would say she did not want to marry at all yet. And her refusing you would put her into a rather uncomfortable position. It might even be best in that case that she should leave us, and, upon my word, I scarcely know which of us three would be the sorriest if she did that. She is like a daughter to me already, and it is just because I long so that she should really be a daughter to me that I counsel you to wait. At present I feel sure she does not want to marry at all, and she would hate hurting you, just as she would hating me, for she could not help knowing, if you asked her to be your wife, how I should love her to accept, and how bitterly her refusal would disappoint me."

Lady Tenby had warmed to her work now. The thoughts which lay below her speech had completely clarified, and she knew exactly what she wanted to say. She had urged him to wait, not only on his own account, but hers, and there was a stronger argument yet.

"For your sake and mine I ask you not to be in a hurry," she said, "and I ask you for hers also. I know you both pretty well, and I know no two people so admirably suited to make each other happy as you two. You have been living in the same house now for a month, and has she ever got on your nerves ; have you ever found her other than an ideal companion ? Of course you have not. As for her, my dear, had it not been you she was thinking about, I should have been just a wee bit jealous. When we have been asking people to dine, it is always, 'I wonder if Ted likes them,' or occasionally, 'Oh, let's ask them to lunch some day when he is playing golf, as I'm sure he doesn't much care for them.' So for her sake, dear, don't speak too soon. Fruit ripens best on a tree, and the wise man lets it ripen there, and then plucks it. Let her liking for you ripen naturally on its own stem, in the sun and air, unconscious of its ripening——"

"How long must I wait ?" he asked.

She laughed kindly, tenderly.

"Oh, my dear, how can I say ? I can't tell you what sort of soul-weather we shall have. But, if that is any comfort, you will know that I am watching, and will tell you."

"Are you sure you will see ?" he asked. "How can you tell ?"

"Ah ! that second sight is one of the consolations a woman has in growing old," she said. "Do you think I have not known what has been going on in you this last week or two ? Do you think it was any surprise to me when you told me what you did ?"

"No, I suppose not," he said. "But if you guessed, why shouldn't she ?"

She considered this.

"I don't think that would be at all a bad thing," she

said. "The point is that at present you should not tell her. There is such a difference."

To say that Lady Tenby was satisfied with the manner of this conversation would be to make a sketch in black-and-white of some polychromatic sunrise. Her mind blazed with colour, for she believed that far the most difficult step in effecting the marriage between Violet and her son was that Ted should fall in love with the girl. But he was always completely to be trusted, and when, as now, he announced that fact, his mother felt she need have no anxiety on the point; for he was not liable to attacks of the noble fever—indeed, she had feared he was immune, and though there was still the other of the contracting parties to make her affirmation, she felt that the second likelihood was greater than the first had been. For here there was much that promised success: the girl liked Ted, as was perfectly obvious; she liked—emphatically liked—Ted's mother, and when the time came she would know how pleasing her acceptance would be to her friend. Violet was generous, ardent, warm-hearted. There was no fear that she would not give due weight, should extra weight be needed, to the desires of so dear a friend. On that point Lady Tenby felt that she would be perfectly right to make her desires carry all the weight they could. There was nothing in the world, as she had said, that she wanted more than this union, and she was probably right in supposing that there were few things in the world that Violet wanted more than to fulfil the desires, so genuine and sincere, of her friend. And in anticipating the weight that her desire for the marriage would have with Violet, it did not seem to her that she would be bringing any unfair influence into play. Quite sincerely she believed that they would make a very happy couple, that they were well suited to each other, and

she felt that she would do anything that lay in her power to bring about their happiness. She herself had immensely liked and admired Violet when she was absolutely impossible as a match for Ted, since in this hard, practical world to disregard material considerations is a sign not of an idealistic but an idiotic mind. All that Violet, even when governess to the imps, had needed to make her an ideal match for Ted was a sufficiency of that dross (as you may call it) without certain quantities of which life—except in a workhouse—literally becomes extinct, and which is required in larger quantities to make it tolerable. Surely, then, since in all other respects Violet had been so ideally suited to Ted before, it was absurd not to see that she was quite ideally suited to him now. And to suggest that this marriage would be a marriage for money was merely a misuse of words.

Her influence, then, with the girl, directly and indirectly, whenever there occurred opportunity to use it, she felt justified in employing to the utmost. Believing, as she did, that they would be immensely happy together, its employment became a duty—so she put it to herself—and not to use it would be like wrapping up the talent in a napkin. It was, therefore, in pursuance of duty that, when Ted left her that morning, she did not go back to the question of quails, but sat down in front of the fire and thought. The very denseness of the fog outside gave her the sense of being cut off from distraction and interruption, and she easily entered that region of concentrated mental activity that is usually accompanied by intense physical quiet. She sat upright in her chair, her hands lying slack on her lap, her eyes looking fixedly into the fire.

It was half an hour later that Violet got home, after a thrilling hour in the fog, and found her still seated

occupationless by the fire. But her thinking was over. She had made up her mind, and her policy was as clearly formulated down into details as if she had prepared it for a blue-book. All that she had advised Ted with regard to delay held good. Her deliberate reflections fully endorsed the impulse on which she had spoken to him. And she had thought about much else also.

“Oh, Aunt Maggie,” said the girl, “I have had such a lovely morning! I got quite lost, quite lost, in Grosvenor Square, and was convinced that Upper Brook Street was South Audley Street until I came right to the end. But the fog began to clear, and after that it was no use. Why, you are sitting doing nothing! The first time ever known, I should think.”

Lady Tenby laughed.

“It isn’t very common, dear,” she said; “but just as the fog drove you out for adventures, it drove me in. We were both playing fog-games, having the sense of being isolated.”

“Oh, I hope your fog-game was as interesting as mine,” said Violet. “Did you get lost, too?”

“Never, quite; and then my fog cleared away like yours, and I saw where I was.”

The girl had taken off her hat, and stood there under the electric light, an entrancing picture. The damp of the air outside stood in condensed drops on the fur collar of her coat and on the golden brown of her hair, and she looked a little wistfully at her friend, with head tilted on one side.

“But your fog-game has been worrying you a little,” she said. “I can see that. Can’t I help at all?”

“No, my dear—not at present, anyhow.”

Violet gave a little sigh.

“It’s so unfair,” she said. “Whenever anything is wrong with me, and whenever I want help, I always run

to you, and you can always give it me. But I can't always help you."

Lady Tenby kissed her.

"But you can, and you do," she said ; "in the fact of your wanting to help me. But you mustn't think there is anything wrong — at least I fully believe everything will go delightfully right."

"And you really can't tell me about it ?"

"No, dear Violet—not now. And if you ask me questions like, 'Does it concern me ?' or, 'Does it concern you ?' I shall answer 'No' to them all, whether truthfully or not. My gracious ! there is the luncheon-gong, and I have done nothing all morning except have a talk with Ted, and then a think with myself. And there are all the household books unlooked at ! Will you go down, dear ? I will follow you in a moment."

That was policy. "The talk with Ted, and the think with myself," was a subtle piece of handling. It was impossible that the girl should not make certain connections in her mind, and Lady Tenby had intended that she should. Otherwise, she meant to take no further step for a week or so to come, and it was the contemplation of that step which had so occupied her this morning. But now she had made up her mind to it.

Then, before leaving the room, she knelt down by her table, and, without any sense of hypocrisy or recoil from herself, prayed that her choice might be blessed. She prayed, also, with no less fervency, that what she had made up her mind to do should never be found out. That was very important.

CHAPTER VIII

THE fog which Violet had found so bewildering and mysterious on the first day of its appearance decidedly outstayed its welcome, and having returned both next day and the day after, became unpopular. It was impossible to "do" anything. There was no telling when one might arrive anywhere, and over and above this, it gave Lady Tenby unpleasant fits of choking. Consequently, on the fourth morning of fog, the intelligence in the daily paper that there was bright sunshine and still weather along the coasts was exasperating for the moment, but suggested to Violet a very simple and sensible idea.

"High Beach! High Beach!" she cried. "Dear Aunt Maggie, let's all go down to High Beach for a few days. We'll take a maid and a housemaid, and a cook and a man, and picnic. Besides, I long to see how they are getting on with the building."

"That does sound a good idea," said Lady Tenby.
"What do you say, Ted?"

"Can't think why nobody thought of it before. Let's go by the midday train."

The plan was put into effect at once, a telegram sent to the caretaker, and they woke next morning, not on to another bleared day of dirt and darkness, but to a sun that flooded the crisp November air and a life-giving breeze from the sea. After breakfast Ted set off for a morning round at golf, and Violet, since Lady Tenby had

determined to be "very good," and clear off arrears of correspondence which she had not felt energetic enough to deal with in the fog, started for a solitary ramble along the cliffs and beach. That fell in with her inclination very well, for she wanted a little talk to herself—a talk that she had put off from day to day in the delightful distraction and novelty of town. But here was a *milieu* very well suited for what she had to think over. All she saw was suggestive of what she wanted to question herself about.

She went across the garden to the narrow path that ran along the edge of the cliff, and turned in the direction of Mr. Winthrop's house, a hundred yards farther on, and the golf-links that lay between High Beach and Raythorpe. How familiar was every step of the way ! Here was the steep sandy path that led down to the beach, and even as she passed it the clock in the stable of Mr. Winthrop's house struck eleven, and the sound brought back to her a hundred echoing memories. Morning after morning she had heard that from the beach below, while the imps counted the strokes to make sure it was not twelve, and the bathing-hour. She had been very happy all this last summer with those naughty, affectionate children, and though her life had blossomed and expanded since then, so that she felt it was hardly the same girl who now skirted along the cliffs in this morning of bright November sun, she felt that, different as all her circumstances had become, she was still the same essential she, and she tried to put herself back into her old position, imagining that she was coming up from the beach to the other house. There stood the gate, and she passed in to stroll through the garden. Close on the left was the border in which she and Lady Tenby had worked all one afternoon only two months ago. They had planted a Dorothy Perkins by one of the pillars of the pergola, and a dozen rose-trees just beyond. That other bed had been nearly empty

before that day ; now all over it were clumps of perennials that would blossom again next year. To the right lay the croquet-lawn, covered with iridescent dew. The hoops had not been taken up, which was extremely careless of the gardener, but the sight of them brought back to her so vividly the remembrance of the summer hours she had passed there that she could almost think she heard the shrill objurgations of the imps accusing each other of a whole Newgate calendar of croquet crimes—moving the balls, playing out of turn, saying that they were through a hoop when they were not. And above that was a gravel-path and a railing, and the window behind it gave light to Mrs. Winthrop's sitting-room. And on that railing one afternoon Frank had sat, and had told her that she was very pretty. . . .

She knew now (though she had concealed it from herself before, shuffling it out of sight) what she had come out alone like this to determine. She wanted to find out, because she did not know it, in what way she thought about Frank. This had become advisable, if not necessary, for since the morning of the first fog she had wondered a good deal what it was that Lady Tenby had been brooding over. Aunt Maggie had given her a little information—if it was information—saying that she had spent the morning in talking to Ted, and subsequently in thinking, and the girl had guessed just what she was meant to guess. It would not, at any rate, have been a surprise to her if he proposed to her.

Did she think of him like that ? And, if not, did she think of anyone else like that ? She wanted to know.

She had told Frank he had better not write to her, and she was rather hurt that he had taken her at her word. Surely, when her accession to fortune had come, he might have known that any reason why he should not do so had become invalid. The only reason there had ever been

was because she occupied a certain position in his mother's house. It was not that she did not want to hear from him. She did want to hear from him, to hear about the dogs and the ponies and—and himself. He would be back, she supposed, in July or August, but that was a long while to wait. Yet again, nothing was more probable than that he had no desire to write to her. They had been good friends, that was true ; he had said she was pretty. But to how many girls, she wondered, had he said that ? Did he write to them all ? Some chaffing remark from his father one day had led her to guess that Frank was susceptible to the charms of her sex. She liked him for that, but she was not sure that she liked the thought of the other girls.

She pulled herself up at this, or rather tried to do so, for her mind was oddly running away with her, and refused to be checked. She had told Lady Tenby after his departure that she was not in love with him, nor he with her, and as far as she knew that was true. It was true now, too, but did she think that if she had been living in the house with him this last month, as she had been with Ted, that she would be still heart-free, or—that he would ? But at that she succeeded in checking the runaway thoughts. They really must not go farther in that direction.

She liked Ted ; she liked him very much. She liked his serenity and sweet temper, his great amiability, his simplicity. He could always be entirely trusted. You could rely on him without fail to do the kind thing and the honourable thing. No one would expect the brilliant thing from him, but she guessed that, at whatever cost, he would do what was honourable and kind. She even admired him physically. There was a suggestion of great strength about him, and his face, a little heavy and full, certainly, for a man of his years, reflected his

character so clearly that it could not be without charm. That being so, she could not but like him for being so much attracted by her, for the devotion of a friend is always a touching and grateful thing to a woman, whether her friendliness is shot with devotion or not. Finally, she could not help knowing instinctively and unerringly how Lady Tenby would love their loving each other. But something, a possibility only, stood between them. She thought she would have done anything for Lady Tenby except disregard that. Had it not been there, she felt that she could easily have loved Ted ; but the possibility was there, and as she thought of it her heart beat a little quicker. She could not help that.

But that quickened heart-beat dictated its own terms, and she made her mind up. She would marry nobody at present. She would wait till the summer brought Frank home again, and then look quietly towards the future. Again and again she told herself that the chances were that she would be nothing to him ; that she never had been ; that he might be in love with somebody else by then ; that he might be married, even. If any of these things were so, she would not be foolish about it. There was no question of a broken heart or a spoiled life. She would have had in her heart the tiniest bud of a romance, which had never flowered, and she would certainly throw it away. And if then Ted wanted her to marry him, she felt no doubt that she would accept him. She was genuinely fond of him, respected him, admired him. Also it would give the intensest pleasure to the woman she loved most in all the world.

Yes, that was all ; the quickened heart-beat acquiesced in the plan, and gradually ceased its accelerated measure. She need hardly have come out alone to settle this, for when once she was face to face with it, it was but the

affair of a moment. Still, this prowl round places that had once been so intimate in her life, and that so short a time ago, and had now ceased altogether to be in it, was an affair which not even Lady Tenby could take part in. Yet, had they ceased to be in it ? Did not the croquet-lawn hold the imps ? Did not the garden-bed hold Lady Tenby ? And did not the railing hold Frank ?

The caretaker, wife of the gardener, had seen her from the house, and came out to her, with low curtsey, asking her if she would not come in and rest. Somehow the curtsey rather nauseated Violet, for the old woman had clearly heard of the change of fortune that had come to her, and was of markedly different demeanour to that which hitherto she had displayed to the imps' governess. It was Bracebridge over again, and with a little sigh (for in this case she could easily manage the tipping which Jack had declared Bracebridge to be in quest of) she deposited her vails and went on her way. There seemed a general opinion that she was different now from what she had been before. Whereas in reality she was just the same—just the same ! All the associations of the place told her that. She had tried to think of them as part of her dead life, and it was of no use. There was the railing in front of Mrs. Winthrop's window. . . .

Her walk had not taken her far, and her talk to herself had not taken her long, but assuredly she had had quite enough of both, and returned to Lady Tenby's house along the top of the cliff. She no longer wanted to revive the memories of the beach and the sea, for she knew what they would be. There would be the thought of the imps and the sand-castles, the thought of the story of the golden uncle, and then there would steal in the thought of him who had come fresh and dripping out of the sea one morning, whom Polly had allowed to listen to the

absurd tale. Or if she thought of the bathes, the teaching of the imps to swim, there would come the thought of the burrowing racing-stroke, the glimpse of arms flung over the head. She did not want to think any more. It was much better to go back, to entice Aunt Maggie out, and get absorbed again, as she had so many times got absorbed before in her vivid vitality. Besides, there was nothing to think about—in all probability there was nothing.

Aunt Maggie was a little surprised to see her back so soon, but the surprise did not reflect itself in the alacrity with which she hastened to put her arrears of correspondence aside, and come out.

“There’s nothing so nice as having a great deal one ought to do,” she said, “and then firmly taking a holiday. It’s no fun taking a holiday if you have nothing to do; a holiday is then merely a necessity. Where have you been, Violet?”

“Only just along the cliff, and into the garden at the Winthrops.”

The girl spoke, so it seemed to Lady Tenby, as if she was tired; her manner lacked its accustomed fire. At present she disregarded that.

“And I hope you looked to see if the roses we planted together were doing well,” she said. “Did the dears seem happy?”

“I think so. Oh, Aunt Maggie, the garden was full of little ghosts! It upset me rather.”

Lady Tenby was quite on the alert.

“Who were these upsetting spectres, dear?” she asked.

“Oh, they were all there, the imps, myself as I was, Mrs. Winthrop.”

She paused a moment. “Mr. Frank, even,” she added.

Lady Tenby laughed, and was ready with her usual encouraging optimism.

“My dear, what pleasant spectres!” she said. “I

can't imagine nicer ones. Every moment we live, every moment, anyhow, that we are making friends, and being in touch with the world, we are building up spectres. They aren't spectres really ; they aren't dead memories, but living pleasures. Fancy your calling the imps spectres ! They would howl at the injustice."

She did not allude to the last name the girl had mentioned, but she had taken note of it. She had also taken note of the pause which preceded it.

" You are comforting. You were among the spectres, too—you and I gardening all one afternoon."

" But I decline to be a spectre, darling," said Aunt Maggie, very loudly and cheerfully. " It is a great liberty to take with me. Spectres—oh, my dear, I know them—spectres are, properly speaking, regrets, mistakes, things that have been and are not. Unless, of course, you regret me, and our friendship——"

The girl made a swift step closer to her.

" Ah, don't, not even in fun," she said.

There was a real ring of entreaty in her voice, and Lady Tenby noted that also. It gave her a moment's hesitation, a moment's heartache. It also confirmed to a certainty the impression that something, some thought or memory, had really upset the girl. Then she laughed with head thrown back and open throat.

" Violet dear, you know I am talking nonsense. I only wanted to make you laugh. Now, we won't go near the haunted house. We will scramble down on to the beach, and get our shoes quite full of sand in the descent. One always does. I don't want to hear, and I don't want you to think anything more about your spectres. You said I was one of them, and the imps were another. Now, see this particularly solid spectre plunge violently down a steep place like the Gadarene swine."

Lady Tenby tucked up her skirts, and went down the

headlong path at a really amazing rate. She wanted Violet to think no more about her little ghosts ; she wanted to think no more about them herself. She was sure they were not profitable, and, in spite of the girl's love for her and trust in her, she determined to lay one of those spectres—to adopt her word—without further loss of time. Anyhow, if it had not been a spectre before, it should become one now.

It was necessary to walk quietly a little while after the descent to regain breath, and the two strolled along the hard, smooth sand, left bare by the ebb of the tide. And then Lady Tenby spoke. She had thought over exactly what she was going to say.

“ How much pleasanter this is than sitting indoors and doing one's duty ! ” she said. “ And my duty this morning was not quite easy. It is so hard to answer some letters.”

She paused a moment.

“ I must tell you, my dear,” she said, “ though he told me to tell nobody. But I am sure what he meant was that I shouldn't tell his father or mother. You see, we were great friends, and I do so love the confidence of young people. I heard this morning from Frank Winthrop. He is engaged to be married.”

She paused for one moment only, but Violet said nothing ; then continued, before a pause was really made :

“ I gather it must be an imprudent marriage,” she went on ; “ otherwise, why should he want me to tell nobody ? But I love imprudence ; I love the absence of calculation. Of course, it must have happened with Frank. He was always making love to every girl he met. He said things to you, do you remember ? You told me that afternoon when we were gardening together. Dear me, if I were only a hundred and fifty years younger, and Frank said pretty things to me, I should simply fall swooning into his arms. I wonder you did not. And,

dear Violet, I am so glad of what you told me that afternoon—that you were not in the least in love with him. I thought perhaps you might have been."

Here she paused again, making a real pause. And Violet spoke.

"Ah, do you think you ought to have told me?" she said, "if he said you were to tell no one?"

Lady Tenby did not require time to reply. She knew perfectly well what to say.

"Oh yes, dear Violet; he clearly meant only that there was to be no official information, so to speak. I knew I could trust you not to tell anyone official—his father and mother. Shall I show you his letter?"

"Oh no, please don't," said the girl.

Lady Tenby had anticipated this. She had known it must be so. The offer could not be accepted.

"Well, there I am, and there are you," she said, "and Frank wants my congratulations, and I know he would like yours. But what are we to say to him? He says she is an angel, with blue hair and yellow eyes. The other way round, perhaps. Anyhow, he is in love, the lucky boy! Very likely it will come to nothing. He may turn up smiling and serene and single next summer, and—and fall in love with you, for aught we know."

That, no doubt, was a joke. She had made one already about her friendship with Violet being a regret, a mistake, at which the girl had not laughed. And she did not laugh at this, either, immediately. But after a pause she did.

"I don't think that much harm will be done," she said. "But does he—do men fall in love as easily as that? May it be one girl in November, and another in the spring, and another in the summer?"

Lady Tenby had not anticipated this. It bore upon another phase of these affairs. It was worth while to

enlarge on this subject lightly (since that was part of the plan), but at length.

" You can't lay down any rules about the behaviour of ' those men,' " she said, " any more than you can lay down rules about the behaviour of ' these women.' Some men, like that angelic Frank, fall promptly in love with every nice girl they see, until they meet the right one, and then they get engaged. Others never fall in love at all till they meet the right one. For instance, I despair about Ted. He simply will not fall in love with anybody. Perhaps when he is seventy he will. But after that he will never fall in love with anybody else. He will know the right one as soon as ever he meets her. And I hope, if he does not fall in love till he is seventy, that he will fall in love with a nice girl of sixty-five, and that she will respond to his ardency. But he, as an instance, is a bad one. I think he hasn't got the faculty of falling in love developed to an extent that is normal with young men. But, as I say, he will know the right one when he sees her. Frank is at the opposite pole. He thinks that every girl is the right one at first. Then there comes another one, and another one, and at last—though it may happen very early in point of mere years—he meets, as he has now done, the right one. Funeral march for all the rest ; Lohengrin march for the one other. What a queer, nice world ! "

She had done it, and she was sorry ; sorry for Violet, sorry for Frank, sorry for herself, who had been obliged to do a thing which on the face of it was hateful. Yet, if the hands of the clock had been put back, and she and Violet were again coming down the Gadarene slope, she would have again made herself do it. For she told herself (instantly believing it) that she was sorry, just as a surgeon is sorry when he has to inflict pain. He inflicts

it for a definite greater gain. Violet, she felt sure, would be very happy with Ted. Ted could only be happy with her, and, after all, she had Violet's own word for it that she was not in love with Frank. Therefore, for everybody concerned, it was better that she should be thus helped not to think about him any more. And yet deep down in her, far away down below her self-justification for the abominable deed she had done, below her self-deception in believing that there could be any excuse for it, her soul sat and cried in the darkness into which she had thrust it out. It was afraid at what she had done ; it was afraid also at what might come of it. But she had done it deliberately, and if it had been still to do, she would do it deliberately again. So the best thing was to shut door and windows, and exclude the feeble whimpering from outside. Once she looked quickly and sideways at Violet, and saw the girl was pale. At that her soul cried out the louder.

But almost immediately, after not more than ten quick paces along the bright, hard sands, the girl answered, and her voice was quite natural. There was no tremor in it, and no trace of that tiredness that Lady Tenby had noticed before.

"I wish I could send a word of congratulation to him," she said, "for we really were good friends. But then it would show him that you had told me ; so I can't. I must be ignorant of it. I wonder when he will tell his father and mother ?"

"I've told him not to be in too great a hurry," said Lady Tenby.

Violet paused a moment. Somehow she had received the impression that Lady Tenby had not answered Frank yet. Perhaps something of the same notion went through Lady Tenby's mind also, for she continued.

"I was writing when you came in," she said. "And,

as I told you, it was rather a difficult letter. You must see my answer when I have finished it, and tell me if you approve. Ah, what an excellent plan it was of yours to come down here, instead of groping about in town ! But it will spoil it if you let yourself be haunted by little ghosts."

Violet drew in long breaths of keen sea-travelled air.

"But I'm not going to let myself be haunted," she said briskly. "You have taught me that what I thought were ghosts were not. Ghosts are regrets, as you said. I see that. And there aren't any regrets. You do teach me such a lot!"

And at that again Lady Tenby's soul shivered and cried.

They walked along the beach right into Raythorpe, for the keenness of the morning encouraged speed, and both secretly felt that they had to walk away from something, leave something behind. And, indeed, there was admirable distraction for the mind to-day, for Nature was in the most joyous of her autumn moods. Troops of seabirds were fishing in the shallow water or busy with investigations into the jetsam on the edge of the spent waves—running, as Violet and her companion approached, to get the speed necessary to lift them into the air, and then circling on ahead, or making a *détour* out to sea, with sudden spread of snowy wings, to resume operations behind them. For a space, while the water was still shallow and sand-churned, the sea was pale green, farther out pale sapphire, with patches of indigo where shadows of clouds fell across it. At their feet the sand sparkled with minute innumerable crystals, and higher up, where it lay still only just out of shadow of the steep sand-cliffs, it glistened with the dew of the night before. Above was the sea of turquoise-coloured air, where floated a few scattered cloud-islands, hard and clear edged, as if blown out of milky glass.

All this, the shining splendour, the big fields of sea and sky, made for strength and strenuousness of living, and before long it made itself heard in Violet's voice.

"I've got to teach myself, too," she said. "All this last month I've done nothing except enjoy myself quite tremendously. But I must set myself a task when we go back to town. I must have drawing-lessons, or music-lessons, and I must read a lot of French. Can one get people to come and talk French to one? My French is so bad, and I was so ashamed the other night when we dined at the Embassy. I talked so badly. It was a disgrace."

Lady Tenby highly approved, for she always approved of things that called forth effort and activity.

"Yes, you are quite right, dear," she said, "and I have wondered when you would feel the necessity of a task. I didn't like to suggest it simply because you were enjoying yourself so much. But it is a good thing for us all to have heaps of work to do. And as a ghost-layer there is nothing like it. Ghosts cannot stand a busy person; they melt before her."

"Oh, I'm not going to be bothered with ghosts again," said Violet.

With a view to putting into practice as soon as possible her excellent resolutions about work and occupation, Violet went up to her bedroom after tea that evening with the object of reading French for a couple of hours before dressing. She had to be alone for this, she explained, since infallibly she would talk if anyone was with her; and in order to thwart the further danger of going to sleep if she sat in a comfortable chair, she established herself in an uncompromising straight-back at her writing-table. But there was not much danger of her going to sleep, and there was but little danger of her getting at all engrossed in the volume of memoirs she had brought up

with her. All day she had steadily refused to let her mind dwell on a certain subject ; all day it had strayed back to it. And after half an hour's struggle she pushed her book aside, and determined to face and then dismiss what had been told her. But it had to be faced first ; she could not dismiss it without.

Whatever had to be faced was of her own making. She exonerated Frank from any share in it. But now that she must definitely and once for all wake herself from her day-dreams, she became aware how vivid they had been and how real. She was not in love with him—at least she believed not—but she had thought of him in a special manner as the man with whom she might fall in love. She had thought of nobody else like that, and she was aware, now that she must cease from that manner of thought, how very distinct it was. But he was engaged ; there was the end of it.

She did not want to grieve or complain, nor did her heart ache. For she had not really misunderstood his friendliness with her ; she did not for a moment say that he had behaved as if he was in love with her. He had called her an awfully pretty girl, and she had wondered at the time how many other girls he had similarly complimented. He had not made love to her, but she had let herself contemplate his doing so. That had been premature of her ; now she paid for it in this hour of slight humiliation and of effort with herself. All that had to go. Each time it occurred to her it must be dismissed, and each time it occurred she must tell herself that she alone was to blame.

She sat supporting her head on her hands, staring at the candle she had lit to read her memoirs. Her day-dreams had been vivid and detailed. She had often pictured herself back again in the other house, with the imps a little older. She had imagined letting

their new governess, whoever she might be, go for a holiday, while she herself looked after them again. There would be the bathes together again just as before ; everything would be as before, and everything so utterly different. Day-dreams, vague yet vivid ; remote yet clear ! It was time to awake.

One effort more she had to make. She had to hope that Frank and another would be tremendously happy. That had to be hoped. And she hoped it, not with the lips or the brain only, but the heart.

This readjustment of the past entailed a readjustment of the future. About that she could not dream yet, for to conjure up a different set of dreams was not yet in her power. But no doubt before very long she would begin to dream again, though at present she could only think. There was plenty to think about. All the delightful gaieties and interests and amusements of life were still waiting, toys ready to her hand, and in addition, which was certainly wise, she was going to do some serious work. She ought to have taken that up before, for it might have left her less leisure for her day-dreams. But however that was, she was going to be very busy now, and work, as Aunt Maggie had said, was the very best remedy for ghost-seeing. Then was Frank a regret ? She must not allow herself to think of that. She must not be sentimental or foolish, or dwell on her mistake, wishing it had been true, and no mistake. And here she was back again, turning over the day-dreams to see if they were quite dead. Dead dreams ! What an unprofitable merchandise of the mind !

Gallantly she set forward again after this step-back. Perhaps the story-form would help, and she began to herself :

“ Once upon a time there was a very foolish girl, who was asleep and dreaming, and she snored so loud that

Aunt Maggie looked in and awoke her, though Aunt Maggie did not know she had been dreaming. So she got up at once, and played the piano with one hand and stitched with the other, and read French memoirs all the time, so that she should not dream again. She lived part of the time by the sea, and part of the time in town, so there was plenty to think about ; and she lived with Aunt Maggie, who was quite the wisest and nicest person in the world. They had the greatest fun, because the girl was really made of gold, like her uncle, and there lived with them Aunt Maggie's son, whose name was Ted. . . .”

At that there was no more story. What about Ted ? She believed that he was in love with her. At least, she had believed that, or was it only another day-dream ? Then she wondered why she had thought “another day-dream,” since she had roundly affirmed that Frank had never been in love with her. There was no satisfactory answer to that, so she supposed it had “slipped out.” From where it had slipped out was immaterial. But Ted ? If he was in love with her, if he told her so, what would her answer be, not now, nor next week, nor next month, but some time ? Aunt Maggie had said only this morning that if ever Ted fell in love, it would be with the right person. What did that mean ? Had she, too, seen, and did that sentence convey her approval ?

And then Violet sat up and pulled the French memoir hastily towards her. She felt she had done enough thinking, and of the two hours to be devoted to the memoirs, already less than one remained. But she attacked her book now, as she attacked the future also, with clearness and resolution to learn, to be awake, not to dream.

Lady Tenby, it appeared, had spent the time during which Violet had isolated herself with her memoirs in hot pursuit of the arrears to which she had intended to devote

the morning, and a little while before the dressing-bell rang she came to Violet's room. Among the arrears was her letter to Frank, which she asked Violet to read, and approve or disapprove. And since this letter was part, so to speak, of the ritual for the laying of a ghost, the girl read it.

In itself it was admirable. It seemed wonderful that a woman of middle life could so recapture the feeling of youth. Youth breathed in every word of it, and most of all was the miracle of it shown in Lady Tenby's complete accord in his wish to keep it secret for the present both from his father and mother. There was no good in telling anybody until marriage became less remote. Meantime, she herself (the writer) was bursting with curiosity. Couldn't he send a photograph of her? She was sure he must have plenty by this time.

Violet folded it up again, laughing. "You are an accessory now," she said. "You have clearly encouraged him. Oh, how do you do it? How do you keep such a young heart? And I had no idea you knew Frank so well. You are writing just like an old friend."

Lady Tenby noticed that he was "Mr. Frank" no longer. "And how long did it take us to be old friends, my dear?" she said. "Is it so strange? There is nothing that breaks down the barriers of age and mere acquaintanceship so quickly and thoroughly as confidence. You gave such a good instance of that just this minute yourself. He has always been 'Mr. Frank' to you till now. But now that you know his secret he is 'Frank.'"

"Did I say 'Frank'?" asked Violet.

Lady Tenby laughed.

"Quite distinctly. It confirms my theory that a person is a friend when you know his secret. I think it was too delicious of Frank to write to me. I feel——"

She stood up, big and genial.

"I feel as if I had made another friend," she said. "The summer gave me one—you, my dear—the autumn seems to have given me another. And when you are a hundred and twenty years old you will know what a new friend means. That is the only thing in this withered old frame called 'Me' which I like at all. I *can* make a friend still. Boys and girls still come to me in their joys. Anyone comes to you in his sorrows. Sorrow can be told to a lamp-post. I would tell the crossing-sweeper that I had toothache, and would be sure of his sympathy. But should I tell him that I had heard from a friend, and was happy in consequence? He would think I was mad."

Violet had left her straight-backed chair, and was standing by Lady Tenby on the hearthrug. Now she pushed her back on to the sofa that stood at right angles from the fireplace, and sat down on the ground by her.

"Oh, you are so big," she said. "And I do want not to be little. Go on; not about anything particular. Just say your usual thoughts as they come into your mind. I want—I want to be soaked in you."

The cry of the little, little banished soul made itself heard again to Lady Tenby. It wanted to come in, to declare itself. There was time yet. Nothing was irrevocable yet. She, the owner of the soul, could still say: "I have lied, and Frank is engaged to nobody." She could still say: "That letter is a bogus letter; I have no intention of sending it." But because the soul was so little, because sincerity had so long and so constantly been denied it, and a false sincerity of manner been made its mouthpiece, she could not admit her soul into the present moment. A thousand reasons rendered it impossible. Violet would lose her friend; Ted would lose his chance of happiness. The great lie, once told, as it had been told this morning, must be carried through. It must be bolstered up, propped, rendered probable. There

was a lot to think about. And in some confused insincere manner, which the wretched woman no longer completely knew to be insincere, she told herself that she was acting for the best. Ted was her son, and he was in love with this girl. She said that in love all was fair. Besides, Violet was not in love with Frank. She had said so herself, and that was most important. If she had been, Lady Tenby felt sure that she would never have done this. And in one instant of time, just as Violet had, alone with her French memoirs, determined to dismiss the past, so Lady Tenby settled now to dismiss it, and act, with all the wisdom and craft that were in her power, up to the possibilities of the present. She would put the fact of her hideous deceit behind her, not recognize it as hers, and go forward, taking it for granted, along the lines to which it led. It might not be easy. She would have to overcome a hundred times her repugnance for what she was doing, but on the whole it was prompted by her sense of the fitness of the union she desired. Tremendously, also, she desired Ted's happiness, and she felt convinced that what she had said this morning was true (among the morning's damnable falsehoods)—that when he fell in love, he would fall in love with the right girl. She did not think at all, at this moment, of Violet's wealth. That which had been to her, but a few weeks ago, the hinge on which the whole question turned, was not in her mind, for it had been digested and assimilated. She only knew that Ted wanted to marry her. And the cry of her soul was no more than the squeak of a mouse in a trap far away.

She laughed. She always laughed.

“Ah, don’t want to be soaked in me,” she said, “but be soaked in yourself. Live for life, as all girls should, and see what comes. You may be sure that what comes will be right. My dear, if you are good and sweet and natural, you can welcome and go out to meet all that

comes to meet you That is the fate in which I believe. We all think we can choose when a choice comes, but our choice is really made not at the moment, but by our life hitherto. You choose according to that which you have chosen a hundred times before. Your destiny is not that which you will do, but that which you have done. Your future lies behind you, in your past."

Violet was sitting with her back against the sofa-side. Lady Tenby gathered her closer, so that she rested against her knees.

"But what we have to leave behind," she said, "are our mistakes and our regrets. They only hamper us. But all that there is of affection and love we take on with us. The past is the future, and the present is the future. All you and I feel at this moment makes what is to come. Will you take me with you into the future, dear? Do put me among your baggage. Your maid will see to it!"

There are no certain data as to where the Devil was at that moment. It is probable that he was there, horns and cloven foot and all, in Violet's bedroom. Certainly he inspired the last words. Violet turned slowly round towards her friend.

"You darling!" she said.

Lady Tenby bent down and kissed her.

"Thank you," she said. "Oh, I do like hearing you say it! But I've heard the dressing-bell so long ago, and we must go and dress. My letter to Frank?"

"Shan't I post it for you?"

Lady Tenby laughed.

"And address the envelope for me?" she said. "That would give it all away. He would know I had told you."

That was true—true in every sense. It certainly would have given it all away.

CHAPTER IX

THE effect of the news that Lady Tenby had told Violet was, in the main, in accordance with what she had expected. How much Violet had hitherto been thinking about Frank she did not know. It was clear, however (and she was satisfied with this), that the girl was now making an effort to put something out of her mind, and, inspired by admirable common sense, she did not sit down and say to herself, "I will not think about this," but with remarkable vigour absorbed herself in things which required that her thoughts should be otherwise employed. And these avocations were pursued in no absent-minded manner ; they were done cheerfully and eagerly, not as mere distractions, but as things in themselves worthy of claiming time and attention. There was no doubt in Lady Tenby's mind that Violet enjoyed doing them ; indeed, she did not notice any diminution at all in the zest and appetite which she brought to the discussion of life.

That fact was largely responsible for the satisfaction with which Lady Tenby regarded the effects of what she had done, for she interpreted it as meaning that she had acted for the best, though the process of the action involved things which, if she regarded them from another standpoint, were not very pretty to look at. It was possible to call them by ugly names, such as lying and treachery. She did not like dwelling on this aspect of them, and since she had a really remarkable control over her own mind, causing it to forget that which she did not

wish it to remember, and to remember that which she did not wish it to forget, she gradually got to not think about the manner in which this desirable state of things with regard to Violet had been arrived at, and to remember only that it was her doing. But this comfortable frame of mind was not at once attainable, and she had several bad quarters of an hour before she captured it. She also found it necessary to pray that she had done right, just as she had prayed when contemplating her manœuvre that it might find favour. And it was characteristic of her that she did this without any sense of hypocrisy. She had been insincere so long that it had become a habit, automatic and instinctive. Curiously enough, too, in her own individual manner, she felt that she needed the inward approbation of her soul. That she had not had at first. It had cried and whimpered in the dark place without, where she had shut it. But before very long its cries were stilled : either it had got accustomed to the dark place, or the place was not so dark, after all.

Her plan had not been undertaken in a hurry. There had been a good deal of painstaking thought expended over it, and now that she looked back on it, it was a comfort to find that she did not seem to have committed any carelessness which might subsequently lead to detection. Violet, it may be remembered, had been asked to treat the information that had been given her confidentially, and by no means to refer to it, directly or indirectly, before Frank's father or mother. She might be implicitly trusted not to do that (Lady Tenby liked dealing with people whom she could implicitly trust), and there was no danger there. Indeed, even when Frank came home in the summer, still no doubt single and spirited, there was no perilous passage to be feared, for it was not possible that Violet should betray to him her knowledge before he made her a confidante of his affairs,

and he could not possibly do that, because there were no such affairs.

Besides, by that time Lady Tenby trusted, hoped, and believed that Ted and Violet would have been married, and that thus her object in these manœuvres would already have been attained. Indeed, the only possible loop-hole where danger might creep in would be if Violet, on Frank's return, was still unmarried, and if the two fell in love with each other. In that case, the intimate unguarded talk of lovers might cause very inconvenient intelligence to come to light, which no doubt would sever with bitterness and scarcely credulous loathing the ties of friendship between herself and Violet. That was not at all a comfortable thought, and one that had better not be allowed to go with a loose rein in the imagination. For there was no use in anticipating a danger so remote, and to anticipate a danger, when there was no means of avoiding it, was a gratuitous discomfort. Certainly that would be very unpleasant indeed, but if Violet ever got engaged to Frank, Lady Tenby reflected that her use for Violet, that which had led to their intimacy, would already be numbered among the things that could no longer be. She would have to be busying herself with looking out for another wife for Ted, and since she would certainly by that time detest Violet for not having married him, it mattered very much less what Violet thought of her.

It would be harsh, even in this uncharitable world, to label Lady Tenby as a fiend, for to be a fiend, not only must the outward expression of the desire, the act by which it manifests itself, be fiendish, which hers undoubtedly was, but the motive behind must be fiendish also, and her motive was not that. It is true that she had lied to Violet in order that her end might be accomplished,

and had lied concerning love, which is a serious thing. Yet even then her insincere sophistry almost acquitted her, for Violet had told her that she was not in love with Frank, and (Lady Tenby asked herself this with a feint of indignant heat) was she not to believe the word of so intimate a friend ? On the same authority she had been told that Frank was not in love with her, and (with less indignation) Lady Tenby hastened to assure herself that that was sufficient for her. Yet the act was fiendish. She knew that, though she tried to shuffle it out of sight. But the motive was not. It almost entirely consisted in maternal love for Ted. She believed Violet would make him happy, and he her, and now that the girl had come into this great fortune it was possible (and even very desirable), from the material point of view, that they should marry. That the marriage would be an extremely convenient one from the worldly point of view she did not consider very much as a determining factor, and told herself that she did not consider it at all.

Such was the crystallization, so to speak, of what she had done, the permanent angled form in which it took its place within her. At first, as on the evening when she had taken her answer to Frank's supposed letter up to Violet's room, she found it a little difficult to be genial and natural, and talk in her large way about making friends and being still trusted with the confidences of young people. But, since she had had so many years of practice in small insincerities delivered with effusive openness, it very soon became easy to make herself unconscious of this great one. At its worst, it was to her, before many days were past, no more than a little superficial sore place, occasionally chafed by boot or wrist-band, and certainly not worth seeing to. She had prayed that what she had done, however the world would judge it, might be judged with approval at the eternal

tribunal, and it almost seemed to her an answer to her prayer that she so soon ceased to worry about it. The world, her friends even, Violet even, might not understand, because they could not see all round an action, but the conviction grew in her that God approved. She had no liking for treachery and lying ; they had hurt her soul. But she had been false and treacherous because she loved her son. And this explanation, once definitely arrived at, could hardly fail to supply encouragement and approbation.

The two or three days which they planned to spend at High Beach had trebled themselves into a week before they returned to town, where they were to spend the time till Christmas. There had been some talk of going abroad after that, and Egypt had been mentioned by Violet on a previous occasion as a place where there was a chance of seeing the sun. But when, not long after their return to town, the subject of post-Christmas plans turned up, she did not mention the land of the Pharaohs again. There were reasons against it which it was not necessary to state.

“ We must soon make up our minds where we are going, Aunt Maggie,” she said. “ I wish you would say exactly where you would most like to go. But that is what I am sure you won’t do. You will try to find out indirectly where I incline to, and say that you want to go there yourself. And then there’s Ted. What would he like best, do you think ? ”

Violet had not definitely mentioned the fact of Ted’s coming with them before, and Lady Tenby had assumed that a jaunt for herself and Violet had been intended.

“ Oh, is Ted coming with us ? ” she asked. “ That will be delightful ! ”

“ I want him to,” said the girl, “ if he will care to. But it is a little awkward. You must help me. You

see, when I say I want you to come abroad, it is easy enough, and if you said you couldn't afford it, I should simply laugh at you, because, of course, it's my treat. But it's rather difficult for me to say the same thing to Ted. I know him very well, of course, but not as I know you. How am I to do it?"

"But not for a moment will I allow you to pay for me," said Lady Tenby. "I never heard of such a thing. I am rolling in wealth, as I haven't spent more than three and sixpence on dress all the autumn."

"Oh, that's nonsense!" said Violet. "It isn't——"

She was silent a moment, trying to put her thought clearly to herself.

"It isn't as if it cost me anything," she said. "I wish it did. But I'm too rich, and that's the fact. I looked at my pass-book yesterday; and it wasn't decent. It is so much greater a pleasure giving people things when you have to deprive yourself of something in consequence. Of course, I am going to take you, and you mustn't thank me, because I don't give you anything that I want. But about Ted?"

They were driving back in Violet's new motor (if her balance was indecent, her expenditure also had been scarcely proper lately) over Putney Bridge, after a clear frosty hour spent in Richmond Park, and she paused again, looking at the red ball of the sun luridly reflected in the steel-blue of the river. A memory, unbidden and unsought for, sprang into her mind, of sitting on the beach with the imps and Frank, one evening in September, at High Beach, and seeing the sun, near its setting, tip the waves with dusky crimson. At the moment, though the memory was very vivid, it seemed strangely remote, and for the first time she registered the success of her determination not to think of him. Nor did she now permit herself any further commerce with memory, and turned

quickly round towards her companion, so as to shut out the sight from her.

"How am I to tackle Ted?" she asked. "It is such a meaningless convention that makes it impossible for a girl to pay for a man, when she happens to be conveniently rich and friends with him."

Lady Tenby laid her hand on Violet's.

"My dear, I shall thank you, and I do," she said, "and I accept your offer, though I said I wouldn't, most gladly. I can't resist you at all. And don't think that because you are rich you are denied the exercise of the quality of generosity. It would indeed be a sorry affair if the accident of wealth prevented your being generous. And about Ted. I agree with you that it is a meaningless convention, considering the terms you are on with him. Well, treat it as such. Tell him you want him to come abroad, and you are going to stand treat. I don't think he will be foolish about it. If he is, I will come and help. But I think it would give him extraordinary pleasure to know that you wanted him to come."

Violet laughed.

"He shall be indulged, then," she said. "But that's more difficult than drawing the cheque. I shall feel dreadfully awkward."

"Then that will imply that you mistrust his affection for you," said Lady Tenby quickly. "If you felt that instinctively, you couldn't imagine there being any awkwardness."

She cast one sideways glance at Violet, saw that she had taken this, and realized that to answer must be embarrassing. So she changed, not the subject, but the manner of presenting it, with great deftness.

"It will do him good, too," she said, "for somehow—somehow I think he wants change. He has been rather silent lately, and very idle, and he hasn't played golf once

since we got back. I think there is something on his mind of some kind."

Lady Tenby considered with lightning rapidity the possible advantages and disadvantages of saying more. The advantages distinctly outweighed the other. It was certainly time that Violet should be admitted, though without, of course, the mention of her own name, to the confidence Ted had given his mother. Whether she had guessed as much before did not concern Lady Tenby. She only wanted to hint, though in the abstract, that affairs of the heart were possibly occupying his head. Perhaps it would be necessary to lie a little if Violet asked certain questions, but since Ted had told her these things in confidence, she was perfectly justified in doing so. Anything else, indeed, would have been unjustifiable.

"You are not anxious about him at all?" asked Violet. She asked it negligently enough, and Lady Tenby distinctly hoped that the negligence was assumed.

"Anxious?" she said, with a laugh. "I am only anxious that I shall prove to have been right, noticing his silence and his indifference, and—and in interpreting them. I am sure you don't mind my talking to you about him, for you are such friends. But, my dear, when a very strong and healthy young man like Ted gets silent and indifferent, and gives loud sighs occasionally—I assure you he sighed so the other day that I thought he must have something wrong with his throat—there is an interpretation that every fond though foolish mother wants to put upon his conduct. She hopes he is in love."

Violet was accustomed to tell everything that happened to her to Lady Tenby. But there were certain things that occurred in the mind that could not be told even to her. They were too secret, and, also, she was not sure of their authenticity. She thought she knew with whom it was that Ted had fallen in love. His mother apparently

only hoped in the abstract that the experience was happening to him.

" You would like that ?" she asked.

Lady Tenby gave a great shout of a laugh.

" I think you said ' like '?" she asked. " Yes, dear, I should like it. I only hope it is some nice girl, and whether she is nice or not, I have almost got to the stage of hoping he will marry her in any case. Bachelors are such pitiable people ! They are just as ridiculous as old maids, and, as a rule, much more tiresome and cranky. My dear, I would almost sooner see you an old maid than see Ted an old bachelor. But there's little chance of the former, anyhow."

That was well done. It must (and did) make it clear to the girl that she and Ted were not associated together in Lady Tenby's mind, since, if she ceased to be a maid (old or young), with regard to him, Ted would cease to be a bachelor. In consequence, Violet spoke more freely than she could have done if she had thought that Aunt Maggie had any such idea in her head. It was not that she wanted to say anything that bore very directly on herself or anyone else, but it needed this to enable her to talk without restraint in the abstract, believing that Lady Tenby was not making any personal application of what she said. And that, after all, though still from the highest possible motives, was exactly what Lady Tenby wanted her to do.

The wind was a little chilly, for the motor was open, and the girl pulled the rug a little higher over her knees, and curled herself up a little lower into her corner. The freshness of the wind of their motion had given a sparkle of added colour to her face, and she both looked and felt tremendously alive.

" Sometimes I wonder whether I want anything more," she said ; " I have such a lot, you know. I have money

and all that it can buy—I mention that first because really it seems to me of the least importance. I have good health, which matters a great deal. I am awfully interested in lots of things, and want to learn, which matters more. I want to draw well, and to play well. I really want. And when I am tired with learning, I have friends to play with. At least, I have you to talk to and play with. I don't know whether I want anything more at all. I think I should be quite content, perhaps, to let the years go by like that. Perhaps I am not a person who falls in love very naturally. Perhaps I am constituted an old maid——”

And then an impulse of confidence suddenly prompted her to say what she had never intended to say to anybody, what she had resolved to forget herself, and had so largely succeeded in forgetting.

“Aunt Maggie, darling,” she said, “I just want to tell you this. I thought last summer that I was falling in love with Frank. I remember telling you that I was not in love with him, and that was true. But I kept thinking of him. We used to—to bathe together, for instance, and I liked his strong brown arms. Somehow I couldn't help it, and it didn't seem to me wrong at all. I—I liked the way his hair curled. It curled so strongly when it got dry after he had bathed, as if it was made of wire. I wanted to touch it. Was that wrong? And his shoulders were so smooth and glistening. Somehow he seemed satisfactory. But then, when you told me about his engagement, all that had seemed quite proper, and natural in my thoughts before, seemed to become forbidden. I suppose I didn't care much; oh, I am sure I didn't, else I could never have told even you. But I liked him, and as it was certain that I wasn't going to—to like him like that, I stopped. It was pretty easy. I was interested in all sorts of other things, and I am now. I

am so thankful I was not in love with him. Else I suppose I must have been miserable now. But I am not!"

Those starry eyes were turned on Lady Tenby, and she met them without flinching. She had great courage, and she needed it. She was perfectly well aware that if Violet had spoken to her about Ted in this fashion, she would have told her point-blank that she was in love with him. But it was not of Ted that Violet spoke. Therefore, under the circumstances, it was as well to make the most of her saying that she was thankful she had not been in love with him. Surely Violet's word might be accepted on that point. She passed in rapid review the points in Violet's speech that were of assistance.

"My dear," she said, "how nice of you to tell me! But of course you were not in love with him. I liked his strong brown arms too, and as for his hair, when it began to dry again after his bathe, I never saw anything so entrancing. I did touch it too; I said there was a spider on it, and picked it off for him. Was it a spider? It might have been a crab, and very likely there was nothing at all. It was like wire: it sprang underneath my fingers. But was I in love with Frank? Just as much as you were, and no more and no less."

Of course there was the good motive behind all this. Whatever Lady Tenby did, she was quite persuaded that there was the good motive lurking behind it, very modest sometimes, and almost desirous of concealment; and the good motive burned strong in what she said next.

"One does not fall in love with brown arms and curly hair, my dear," she said. "They are nice—of course they are nice, just as the sun was nice when it was reflected in the grey-blue of the river as we crossed the bridge. There are plenty of things that make one hold one's breath. Every day, and often every day, I hold my breath for the

pleasure of what I see. I hold my breath (or I easily could) at you sitting there with your violet eyes—you were called after them, and they always look violet when dusk draws on—I could hold my breath for pleasure when I think of the delightful evening we are going to have—early dinner, and that divine concert. Ted is looking forward to it so much, by the way : you played him the third Brandenburg concerto, he told me, on the piano——”

Already these topics had distracted Violet's mind from her confession, exactly as they were meant to do. She laughed.

“ If he can look forward to it after that, he is wonderful,” she said. “ There was a sectional murder of it.”

“ He loves your playing,” said Lady Tenby quietly.

“ Nobody loves my playing,” said Violet with decision, “ because I can't play. But it's very nice of him to think he does. Oh dear, here we are back in South Street, and we had only just begun to talk. But that is always the way. There is no end to the things one wants to say to the people one loves, and so it is always the beginning. Or is there no beginning either ? Is one always in the middle ? And—and am I really to talk to Ted about his coming abroad with us ?”

“ Yes, do, dear,” said Lady Tenby, “ if you are sure you would really like him to come.”

“ Of course I would ; he must, if we can think of a place he would like.”

“ You will find he will like any place you propose,” said she, wondering if Violet would catch the hint that lay below it. Apparently she did not.

“ I know exactly what will happen,” she said. “ We shall all be so terribly unselfish that we shall not be able to fix on any place at all.”

“ Are you going to talk to him about it now ?” asked Lady Tenby.

Violet glanced at the clock, but found there no pretext for putting this off.

"Oh, I think to-morrow morning," she said, without giving foolish excuses.

Ted, as Lady Tenby had told Violet, was looking forward to the concert, and had already been with them to several during the last week or two. This cultivation of music was a perfectly new development of taste in him, and it was not difficult to find its origin. For the tastes of the beloved, however incomprehensible, are always near to the heart of the lover, and if Violet was going to a concert, he would much sooner go too than do anything else. Also, a concert in the evening led to Violet's playing over to him—indicating, perhaps, would express the style better—something of what he was going to hear, and a repetition of it afterwards. Without being able to play in any technical sense, she had an extraordinarily sympathetic finger, and her "indications" would certainly have charmed a musician, though they might not have appealed to a pianist. But it was neither as musician nor pianist, but as lover that they appealed to him. In his quiet, reliable manner he had fallen completely in love with her, and to be with her was what he wanted. To say that he was desperately in love with her would be abuse of language, since desperation of feeling was not compassable by his quiet, contented spirit, but the thought of her robbed him of his contentment. Once, since he had spoken to his mother of his love at High Beach, he had again, and that this morning, asked her if the time was not ripe for him to speak to Violet, but she had strongly dissuaded him.

"Things are going very well indeed, dear," she had said; "pray do not spoil them. I shall not ask you to be patient very long, I think."

His dark eyes lit up at this.

" You think I have a chance ?" he said.

" I think you very soon will."

He looked vaguely out of the window for a moment.

" I remember you once told me she was very great friends with—what is his name ? that nice merry fellow at High Beach—Frank Winthrop."

Lady Tenby remembered something of the sort : it had served her end at the time, probably, but she had no use for it now."

" Oh, you misunderstood me, if you thought I meant that," she said. " Now, dear, it's after eleven : and I remember Violet said she would strum the Brandenburg to you then. I think I shall come and listen to it too."

" Oh, please don't !" said he, hurrying from the room with unusual speed.

So that evening the three, schemer and schemed-against and schemed-for, went to their concert, and had their souls watered and shone upon by the rain and glory of divine melodies. Strange joys and mysterious sorrows from Poland came to them—joys that endured but for a little, courage that soon faltered, and sorrow that endured till the last wailing of 'cellos died. Lady Tenby had a copy of the " Miniature Scores " in which she more or less followed the music, sometimes turning over half a dozen pages (having completely lost her place), when it was clear that the movement was coming to an end ; sometimes turning back a page or two when, owing to the nearness of the end, it was obvious that she was getting on too fast ; and when it was really finished, she shut her book up with decision.

" I feel as if I had done something dreadful, and didn't know what it was," she remarked.

" Wants a tonic," said Ted, " or a week at High Beach."

" Oh, you idiots !" said Violet.

" Why ?" asked he.

" Because it's music. Dear Aunt Maggie, am I rude ?"

" Not particularly. What is it next ? Oh, the Brandenburg. Tum-ti-tum. I haven't got a score of it."

Violet laughed.

" Darling, it isn't Tum-ti-tum," she said, " it's Ti-ti-tum, ti-ti-tum ! I must get quite comfortable before they begin. There !"

She shook her shoulders back and down, and laid a hand on the arm between Ted's chair and hers. His arm was already there, and her fingers spread themselves open over it.

" Oh, I'm so sorry," she said, withdrawing them.

" I like it," said he, making the first love-speech of his life.

For one half-second Violet felt an embarrassment she had never before felt with him. It was absurd to put her hand back : it was absurd to be silent, as if his spurted-out speech meant anything.

" Oh, that's your arm of the chair," she said. " Aunt Maggie has got two. I shall turn her out."

Even that was elaborate ; but it did not matter, for at the moment the third Brandenburg began. The gaiety of it ! The tenderness of it ! Across the gulf of centuries spoke the charm of the inevitable melody, instinct with the sun that shone there, and the pleasure of simple things, with wine and food, and the rapture of living and working and loving. It was all so human and simple that probably even Lady Tenby, had she had the score, would have forgotten she was not turning over correctly, and have made no effort to rectify her mistakes. All the youth and the pleasure of tranquil days was there—days that seemed as young as those of the creation when light was new upon the earth, and the sea was made, and on the land the green things first saw the sun, and everything was good. Phrase after phrase, each a string of pearls, leaped up into the

entranced air, leaping with the spontaneous gaiety of a child at play. Another child leaped also, and another and another, till the whole orchestra of them was dancing to the same mirthful rhythm and exquisite melody. And behind it all, smiling at and approving their glee, the wise old master sat, directing their dance, putting down in the straight, upright handwriting the symbols of their joy, with glee and merriment himself, but with more than that—with the tenderness of spirit and the genial wisdom that years had taught him. Centuries ago he did that, sitting in the little garden house about which the vines ran, with the breeze stirring the leaves of his music-paper, and the glint of the sun through the vine-leaves warming the hand that so zealously traced the notes ; and to-day he and his trooping children, his phrases of pearls, were here again. . . . What was it, Violet unconsciously asked herself, to which they were listening ? Were they listening with their ears to music, or beholding sunshine with their eyes, or feeling the breeze of spring on their faces, or looking at the sparkle of the sea, breaking rhythmically on a shining sand ?

And at the end unconsciously again she laid her hand on Ted's arm.

" Oh, Ted !" she said. " What a simple, beautiful life, so young and wise ! "

Violet gave a great sigh and looked at him, still possessed by the enchantment of the music, still unaware of him as a man, but only as a fellow-listener with whom she was friends. And she, or the music, or the combination probably of her and her joy in the music, smote upon him with soft fire.

" It's just like you," he said.

Violet was still absorbed.

" Oh, I wish it was !" she said. " I would give anything to be like that. It isn't gay only, it's wise and kind. . . . "

And then she remembered the existence of present-day relationships.

"It's far more like Aunt Maggie," she said. "Aunt Maggie, we've settled you are like the Brandenburg concerto. You are, too. Now I think we had better go away."

"But there's the C minor," said Lady Tenby, "And I've got the score. But, my dear, of course I'll come away if you like."

Ted stood up.

"I want to go," he said. "I can't listen any more. Shall I take you home, Violet?"

For a moment Violet wavered. She did not, as a matter of fact, want to hear any more music after the last piece, however prodigious a masterpiece should follow. On the other hand, she did not quite want to go home alone with Ted. As the immediate effervescence of the Brandenburg died off, she became aware that there was another effervescence going on in his lit eyes and eager face. "He is going to speak," she said to herself, and was aware that she did not want that just yet. She wanted to think a little first, to find out what she really felt.

"Oh, Ted, but it's the C minor," she said. "I think we must hear that, mustn't we? Let's all go home together afterwards."

That night, again, Violet did not sleep well. Probably music-emotion helped to keep her awake; more probably other emotions kept her awake, and the stimulus of the music rendered them doubly vivid in her brain. For her relations with Ted, it seemed to her, had entered upon a new phase. Hitherto, aware though she had been, by the secret woman-instinct that all girls possess, that he was in love with her, that fact had seemed to stand apart from her, to be external to herself, so that she was not involved in it. But to-night she knew that she could

no longer think of it like that. Light shone on her, and it was impossible not to be illuminated. It was as if some ship out at sea had thrown a searchlight on her, as she sat in the cool dusk of her maidenhood. She was discovered sitting there, was no longer able to pretend she was unseen. In a way it was her own fault, for she had, so to speak, struck a little light herself that showed where she was, when, in that moment of delicious unselfconsciousness after the Bach, she had taken him into her confidence in a way that, trivial though it was, she had never quite done before. She had but said that a simple, beautiful life was there, and then his flashlight had come, saying that it was like her. In itself the thing had been of straw-like insignificance, but she felt, rightly, that it had the significance of the ultimate. Something had broken down between them : they stood face to face. There was no sitting in the dark any more. His signal and search was on her. She had deliberately to accept it, or turn her back on it.

Violet was not one of those girls who, by living, not exactly in the clouds, but in a vague low-lying mist, lose sight of the earth altogether. She did not want to shuffle the practical consideration of existence out of sight, and content herself with finding it very pleasant in the mist. In other words, she asked herself two questions : "Do I intend to marry or not ?" and "Do I intend to marry Ted or not ?"

The first answered itself : all her potential womanhood answered it. She wanted even now, when the loneliness of her earlier life had so completely passed, and she was so dear and intimate a habitant of her friend's house, to be much more than this—to be more firmly rooted in the world, to have a man who was hers, to be woman to him, mother of children, partaker in the fate of the human race, not stand apart from sweet normal experiences. For

she was very normal, very much akin in the broad general needs of her nature to the average girl. She had marked out no solitary destiny for herself, held no exceptional fate in front of her, had no gift that demanded isolated cultivation, desired nothing better than that which was certainly the best. That question was not difficult to answer.

With regard to the more special question, it was not so easy to know her own mind, for here there was an absence of instinctive, and so of overwhelming, prompting. It was no use intending in general to marry, for marriage takes place between individuals. And the one in question was he with whom, of all those that had come across her orbit, she could most easily see herself in constant companionship. She knew him well by now, knew his kindness and strength and serenity . . . and then she remembered that she had been through all this before, on the first morning at High Beach. She had said all that to herself, but—and it was this that made it seem remote, so that the repetition of it had not struck her—all that had then been subject to what the next summer would bring when Frank came home. She had determined to wait for that. Her determination was unnecessary now. Things had determined themselves otherwise ; all conditions dependent on that were cancelled.

Yes ; she liked him, she liked him immensely. She could easily imagine taking care of him, and loving to do it ; she could tell herself that she would be very safe also if she entrusted herself to him. There was no one else that she put, so to speak, in the same drawer with him. He had the drawer quite to himself, and she had made it fragrant with all the pleasant-smelling herbs of affection and liking. Another reason, too, and that by no means one to be lightly disregarded, pulled in the same direction. She would, by accepting him, give to her dearest

friend that which in all the world she most longed for. It was hardly possible to value that too highly, and though it would not have determined her choice had her own feeling towards Ted not been genuinely warm and affectionate, it could not but add considerable weight to a scale already well-laden. She felt sure that Aunt Maggie desired nothing so much, and even if she herself had not cared for Ted, the refusal of him for the sake of this alone would have been hard to make. As it was, it was but another cord pulling her in the direction in which she was really willing to go.

It was at the hour when London is stillest that she arrived at this point. The latest of home-goers was returned, the earliest of bread-winners was not yet abroad. The night outside was windless, but wintry rain had begun to fall, and she heard it splashing on the pavements and roadway, even as one night at High Beach, when the house was still, she heard it hissing on to the shrubs. And before the earliest traffic stirred she fell asleep, tranquilly and contentedly, for assuredly her lines were laid in pleasant places.

Next morning came the interview with Ted concerning their foreign plans for the weeks succeeding Christmas. She wished rather that she had not procrastinated about it the evening before, since both those two little sentences of his to her at the concert and her own small-hour reflections made her for the first time a little nervous of him ; but clearly the question was not one to put off, and after breakfast she opened the matter to him. Lady Tenby had already breakfasted and gone, and the two were alone.

“ Ted, give me one minute of your time,” she said, “ and finish your paper afterwards.”

He laid it down.

“ Two, three,” he said. “ What is it all about ? By

the way, will you go through the Brandenburg with me again this morning?"

"Yes, if you are sensible," said she.

"I always am."

"Very well, don't let an exception prove the rule. It's only this: I want to go abroad after Christmas, and I want you and Aunt Maggie to come with me."

"Wish we could," he said, "but there's a financial crisis. I've got to do all outside repairs at Chevely, and the roof appears to be getting like a sieve. I got the estimates only this morning. I told mother I thought they would be heavy, but they are worse than heavy, they are back-breaking. I should have liked it tremendously."

"Well, I ask you to come with me," said she. "Oh, don't you understand? Do come, Ted. It's my treat. I shan't go unless you both come. Aunt Maggie was sensible, and she said she felt sure you would be. Please."

The paper slipped rustling to the floor, and he looked at her with eyes that were serious and troubled.

"I can't," he said—"I simply can't. You've already given us far too much. I've been bothered about it before, and I haven't quite liked to say anything. There's the money you pay us, there are the rooms you built for us at High Beach, there are a million things. I know how devoted you and mother are to each other, so I suppose that makes it all right for her to take what you give. Anyhow, it's your business and hers. But when it comes to a direct gift like that to me— And I've never thanked you for offering it. It was awfully good of you. But you do understand, don't you?"

"No, I certainly don't," said Violet, rather vexed. "You will disappoint two people—Aunt Maggie and me (for I really shan't go without you)—just because you are absurd and conventional. It isn't as if we weren't great

friends. If you had all the stupid money, and asked Aunt Maggie and me to go abroad with you, I should go like a shot—and stipulate for a little pocket-money, too!"

He still looked at her with trouble in his face. What she did not notice was that his breath was being taken rather quickly, and that his hand trembled.

"So just say that it's all right," she added hopefully.

Again there was silence, and she looked at him more attentively, with him in her mind more than their little dispute. And then she dropped her eyes, and waited, for she saw he was thinking, not of their little dispute at all, but completely of her.

"Violet," he said, "you have given us too much. I ask for more, for all."

At that he came towards her, and she neither shrank from him nor advanced.

"For all," he repeated—"for you!"

Violet did not have to recall to her mind the reasons for marrying him. She knew them all perfectly well, and they were all very good.

"Oh, Ted!" she said; "do you mean that? Are . . . are you sure?"

"I think you know that yourself," he said.

After this was silence, and Violet, though she did not know why, felt her eyes filling with tears. Beneath his quietness and simplicity there was something that strangely moved her. She knew his sincerity, and his honour, and his love. She would not have had him fervid or fevered, for it would not have been he, and she knew that if in this great moment there lacked something, that lack must be in herself.

"Or do I distress you?" he asked gently, as the pause was prolonged. "Will you tell me some other time? I am very patient. I will wait."

She saw him but dimly through the moisture of her

eyes—a figure of blurred outline and uncertain feature. It was as if she had raised her head from the sea after a dive, and hazily seen another swimming by her.

"No, dear Ted, I do not ask you to wait," she said. "Take me, my dear, if you really want me. I like you so much—so much."

She raised her face to his, and trembling lips met hers that trembled. She was a little timid of him now, she who had always met him on such frank and easy terms.

"I am not content with that," he said gently, "for I can't bear to see you crying. Why is that?"

"I am not going to cry any more," she said. "But I will love you instead. Will that do?"

"Nothing else will do, my darling," said he.

"Ah, already you command me! I like you to do that. Shall we go to Aunt Maggie and tell her?"

"Not just yet," said he.

* * * * *

These few minutes, which had been so momentous for them, had been scarcely less momentous for Lady Tenby. There had been a round dozen of letters for her when she came down to breakfast, and she had gone to her room with them, after opening six only, as soon as she had finished. The sixth still lay open before her, and though she had read it several times, she still re-read it. It was from Frank, and ran thus :

"DEAR LADY TENBY,

"CITADEL BARRACKS,
"CAIRO.

"You were so kind and friendly with me at High Beach that I am venturing to write to you quite confidentially.

"My mother tells me that Miss Allenby has come into a great fortune, and has gone to live with you. I want so much to write to her and congratulate her, but she

told me I mightn't write. So will you say you have had a note from me, saying how awfully pleased I am ? You might say, too, that I would have written, only she told me not. But we really were rather good friends, you see, and I should hate her to think that I didn't care. The imps will miss her frightfully, I expect, and will loathe the golden uncle for dying. How ripping for you, having her to live with you, and awfully nice for her ! So do congratulate her for me, will you ? The two dogs were really very glad to see me, though one had mange. It's this climate. I've played a lot of polo lately, and we have a good chance for the cup, bar accidents. Otherwise, Cairo is very dull. The post is just going.

“Sincerely yours,

“FRANK WINTHROP.”

It was a letter ordinary and boyish. There should have been nothing to make her read and re-read it. There should have been nothing to make her wonder whether Providence had got a spite against her. But somehow it smote upon her. There was no need to read between the lines ; the lines themselves were sufficient. Her consciousness of maternal duty done had hitherto reconciled her with the great lie she had told, but, since she was not a fiend, this simple little letter, saying so little, meaning so much, tore open the reconciliation. She had always liked Frank. He was a youth of obvious attraction to women. Middle-aged as she was, she had felt enough of that to know what the normal girl would feel. Any girl, except the quaint and unusual, with whom she had no sympathy, would like him, and like to be liked by him.

A wave of shame for the great lie uplifted her. It was not quite irrecoverable yet. Ted had been very leisurely in his lover-business. When she had asked him to delay speaking, he had bowed to her wisdom instead of trusting

to his own heart. Without doubt she had been right, but he ought never to have acquiesced in the wisdom of another. At the moment she despised him for his acquiescence. It was likely that his love-making, when she permitted it, would be of tepid temperature—not of the heat to infect and inflame. Violet, who had given her no hint of her feelings towards Ted, except friendliness, might easily refuse him. What would she herself then be left with ? The cold ashes of a lie that in its burning had never roused a flame.

[Yet, if the lie was not irrevocable, what would be needed to revoke it ? She had to count the cost about that. It was possible in the physical world to kill a child before it was born, though in the ordinary course of events it would be born—born for certain, as far as anything was certain. And in the world of the mind and the soul it was possible to commit the same damnable crime, and she, as far as could be humanly told, had committed it. Violet, from what she had told her, was ready to give birth to love ; Frank, as this boyish letter showed, was ready also. Love might have been born, and she had injected her deathly lie. And the injection had taken effect ; no longer was love going to be born between them. Her maternal love for Ted had prompted what she had done. She still told herself that, screening herself from herself by herself.

She could still render her horrid injection powerless. The confession of her crime to Violet would be an antidote to its effect. At least, it was possible. But the cost was heavy. She was very fond of the girl ; she had to put on the board all that. Violet would certainly be incredulous, and she must be convinced. Lady Tenby had to convince her that she had told the most infamous of lies. Violet would not be easily convinced of that, because she loved her.

All this debate took time. It was not instantaneously decided on, as should have been the case, if Lady Tenby really recoiled from the lie. But she did not really recoil ; she tried to think of some sort of compromise which, in the nature of things, could not exist.

And then it was too late.

The door opened, and Violet and Ted came in together.

"Aunt Maggie," said she, "Ted and I—"

She stopped.

"Violet and I—" said Ted.

The thin blue sheet of paper underneath Lady Tenby's hand was suddenly crushed up into a ball of waste-paper. It was doubtful, to say the least of it, whether her will would have been strong enough without this to have made her honest. Now her will was crumpled more instantaneously and completely than Frank's letter.

"You darlings, you darlings!" she cried.

CHAPTER X

MRS. WINTHROP licked the gum of the envelope to its extremities, and flattened the flap down. Her husband, watching her, wondered in his quiet philosophical manner how the recipient would ever open it. He would have to scratch and peck at it ; probably he would have to cut a strip off the top with nail-scissors. His wife recalled him to himself.

"I was deceived in Lady Tenby," she said ; "and the only difference between you and me, James, is that I am not ashamed to confess it, and you are."

The casual observer would have thought there was more difference than that. But Mrs. Winthrop disagreed with him. She scratched an angry address on her envelope.

"Not but what I had my suspicions occasionally," she went on ; "for, to be sure, when a woman like Lady Tenby spends all afternoon planting for you in the garden bushels of rose-trees which she has brought herself, you may depend on it that she wants something from you, and her not telling you what it is straight out but shows her cunning. And Miss Allenby going to dinner there night after night ! Well, I am sure nobody can say that I am a calculating woman, or make artful plans to marry my son to an heiress. But I am disappointed in Miss Allenby. I thought better of her than that, and I'm sure the whole affair teaches us how foolish we are to think well of anybody. "

"You thought better of her than what ?" asked her

husband, to whom the processes of Mrs. Winthrop's mind were a perennial source of contemplative enjoyment.

"It isn't," said Mrs. Winthrop, ignoring the question—"it isn't as if I hadn't always said that there was something common about Miss Allenby, though I give her her due when I say that nobody ever managed the imps like her. And when I put her in the way of doing my circulars, she was not unintelligent. But she must now go and sell herself for a title, like all the rest of those foolish girls. As for him, you know, James, what I've always thought of marriages for money, and I haven't altered my opinion now. Not that I bear him any ill-will, and I hope he will live long to enjoy his wife's money, though I'm sure he's more than inclined to stoutness, and as likely as not he'll have a stroke before he's forty."

Mrs. Winthrop lit a candle to seal her letter with a trembling hand.

"I don't understand why you are disappointed in Miss Allenby, my dear?" asked her husband.

"I thought I had made it clear. For throwing herself into the arms of the first man with a title who wants her for her money."

"But how do you know that they are not very fond of each other?" asked he.

"It is easy to be fond of anybody with a million and a half. No, James, I have lived half a century in this world, and I no longer require to be told what is a love-match and what is not. To be sure, Lady Tenby designed that from the beginning. She saw that there was some truth in the golden uncle, though you thought it was just nonsense to amuse Polly and Jack. And to think that there was Frank with us all the summer, eating his heart out, for it was no less than that, for the girl, and you telling him that she was just a governess, and he mustn't make her position awkward for her."

Mr. Winthrop crossed his legs comfortably. This was what remained in his wife's mind of the scene when Frank called Miss Allenby awfully pretty. He did not the least wish to dispute the accuracy of it with her ; his enjoyment lay in her version of it.

"And then her writing to me to tell me of her engagement!" continued that deeply injured lady. "Of course, I shall make a perfectly proper reply, and say that I hope she will be very happy. If she thinks I am going to tell her my real opinion of her conduct, she is vastly mistaken. I am sure she is nothing to us any more, and I certainly shall not go to her wedding, even if she asks me. Very likely she will not ; that would be quite of a piece with the rest of it. We have not titles and millions of pounds. I am quite aware of that. I hope they make Miss Allenby happier, but I never heard that there was more peace in palaces than in humbler abodes."

Mrs. Winthrop deposited a perfect pool of red sealing-wax on her envelope, and rubbed it in with the stick, till you would have thought she meant to bore a hole through it and the letter. Then she stamped a seal on to it with the vigour of a steam-hammer, so that the wax squirted from under it like mud from beneath the wheels of a motor-omnibus. That concluded her correspondence for the day. She blew the taper out with a gust that would have extinguished a conflagration, and laughed bitterly.

"And to think of the fuss they all made over her here when we came back in October and her fortune was known!" she said. "Such dinner invitations were never known, for if we were asked out to dine—bringing Miss Allenby, of course—once during that fortnight we were asked fifty times ; and Mrs. Saddler calling here one day, and her son the next, and a lawn-tennis party all for Miss Allenby. Shall I ever forget that party, James, when I arrived there alone ? For Miss Allenby had to go up to London, if you

remember, and see her lawyers ? There was Mrs. Saddler, with a great grin, and Arthur Saddler, with his glass screwed in his eye, and such clothes—mustard colour, with a pink tie—and all the rest of the Claytons and the Ellises clustering around. But when I said that Miss Allenby had had to go to town—why, I might have been in the desert of Sahara, or at the North Pole, for all the company I was in. There was I with my racket—for I like a game of lawn-tennis, as you know ; and not one did I play ; not that I minded that, for you might as well have played in the water-meadows. There was a set of new balls, too, but that odious Arthur Saddler took them indoors again when it appeared Miss Allenby wasn't coming. The old balls were good enough for anyone else."

"I wish I had gone," said Mr. Winthrop regretfully. "I feel I missed something."

"You missed a cup of cold tea and a finger-biscuit," said Mrs. Winthrop, with brisk accuracy ; "for that was all I got. But then it struck Mrs. Saddler, I suppose, that Miss Allenby was coming back ; and when I said she was, all the civilities began over again, and would I have some fresh tea ? when it was six o'clock already ; and would I have a game of lawn-tennis ? when it was quite dark. I bear Mrs. Saddler no ill-will, and I dare say she is a perfectly honest woman, but it's a fact that I've seen nothing but the back of her since Miss Allenby left us. And what I say of Mrs. Saddler I say of the Claytons and the Ellises, too. They have shown themselves in their true light, and if it makes them look what I for one would be sorry to look like, it cannot be considered my fault."

Mrs. Winthrop had worked herself into a species of fiery good-humour at the recollection of the famous tennis-party, and she hit on a plan that was designed to minister fuel to it.

"Miss Allenby's engagement was not announced in the paper this morning," she said, "and since Mrs. Saddler takes such an interest in her, I think I can spare time to call this afternoon and tell her about it. If you come with me, pray don't put in your oar and spoil it all. I shall not tell her till I have had my tea. I learned that from my experience at the tennis-party."

A timid knock came at the door, and Miss Smithson, the new governess, tall and distressed, entered.

"Yes?" asked Mrs. Winthrop, opening and shutting the drawers of her knee-hole table. "Yes, Miss Smithson?"

"Please, Mrs. Winthrop, Polly and Jack have barricaded themselves into the night-nursery, and it is time they went for their walk. What am I to do?"

"Say they shall be put to bed for the rest of the day unless they come out at once," said their mother.

"I have said that. It doesn't do any good."

"Was there any reason for their being naughty?"

"I had only said that I didn't think the photograph of their last governess was very pretty."

"Oh, that was quite enough," said Mr. Winthrop. "If you could manage to say that you were mistaken, the barricades would come down like—like the walls of Jericho."

"No," said Mrs. Winthrop. "Miss Smithson has said that, and she must stick to it. Tell them that I have some news from Miss Allenby, and that if they don't come out at once they shall never hear it. But make it clear that they shall go to bed for the rest of the day just the same."

Miss Smithson departed feebly.

"That will bring them," said Mr. Winthrop.

"Though what they found in Miss Allenby I can't imagine," said his wife.

"Well, they found something. And what about letting them go to stay with her, as she asks, in town? I think Miss Smithson looks as if a rest would be good for her."

"And I've got all the Happy Evening circulars to send out, as well as 'The Drunkard's Dream,'" said his wife. "That would rest her. I think they may as well go. Whatever Miss Allenby is, or is not, she is fond of the imps."

There was the sound of racing footsteps down the passage, and the imps burst in. Jack was fantastically clothed in night-shirt and knickerbockers; Polly was completely dressed.

"You see, I'd begun to go to bed to save time," he shouted, "because, of course, I knew we should have to. Polly said that was foolish, because it would be evening before the barricade——"

"Oh, shut up," said Polly. "Mummy, what about Miss Allenby? Is she coming here? Is it nice?"

"She's invited you——"

"Me, too?" shrieked Jack, jumping wildly about, so that the tail of his night-shirt flew high in the air.

"She's invited you both to stay with her in London. I'm not sure that you can be trusted——"

"Oh, but we can," shouted Polly; "you know quite well we were never naughty—at least, hardly ever—when Miss Allenby was here. Oh, mummy, mayn't we go? Besides, it wasn't our fault about the barricade. Miss Smithson said——"

"Miss Smithson," remarked Mr. Winthrop, "said you should go to bed for the rest of the day. So you shall."

"But she said Miss Allenby wasn't pretty first," said Jack. "That began it. Shall I call Miss Smithson, mummy? I'm sure she'll tell you so, too."

Polly was bouncing up and down in an armchair, in the manner of cup and ball. At this moment she bounced

too much forward, and sat down on the floor instead. She had been holding her mouth open so as to speak as soon as there was a moment's silence, and she appeared to be unaware that she was sitting on the floor instead of the chair.

"Jack usually lies," she said ; "but this time it's quite, quite true."

"She asks you to stop with her over Christmas," said Mrs. Winthrop. "Of course, you will have to learn the collects just the same as if you were here."

"I'll learn the 'pistles too, mummy, if you like," cried Polly.

"And the gospels!" shrieked Jack. "We'll learn it all. And may we go this afternoon? We—we could go to bed in the train," he added by a brilliant after-thought.

"Certainly not; you are going to bed now, and you may tell nurse that you are all going to London tomorrow, and that she may pack your things."

"Oh, thank you, mummy!" said Polly. "It will be nice going away. May we go before breakfast, if we go to bed quick now?"

"No. But there's some more news from Miss Allenby. She's going to be married."

Polly's face fell.

"I'm not sure that I like that," she said. "Or would she like us to? Who's it to, mummy?"

"To Lord Tenby."

Jack put out his tongue at his sister to its full extent.

"I told you so," he said. "Will she be Lady Tenby then, mummy?"

"Yes."

"Oh! What will they do with the old one? Will they drown her like when there are too many kittens?"

"No, of course not."

Polly put out her tongue in turn.

"I said they wouldn't, Jack," she remarked. "That's quits."

"Tisn't. I only said perhaps they would. But it would have been lovely. I don't mind her marrying a bit. And I like Lord Tenby. He gave me a golf-ball."

Mr. Winthrop gave a little sigh.

"It will soon be past their ordinary bedtime," he remarked. "And if we are going to call on Mrs. Saddler, Minnie, it would be well to start."

"And I shall take my Prayer-Book to bed, and begin learning the collects at once," chanted Polly. "May Miss Smithson come in every now and then and hear us?"

"And shall we say them to her before we start to-morrow?" asked Jack, "or to Miss Allenby in London?"

"I shall say them to both," said Polly.

The imps whirlwinded away in a state of the highest excitement and enjoyment. Owing to their advancing years, they no longer occupied the night-nursery together, and Jack slept in a dressing-room adjoining it. They left this door of communication between the two open, and loud vehement repetitions and corrections of the collect for Christmas Day went from one to the other. Between whiles they made plans for London, and had a very happy afternoon.

Violet had sent the letter conveying the news of her engagement and the invitation to the imps on the day after her engagement, which was to be announced before Christmas. The invitation was not a sudden thought, but a plan she had long meant to carry out, and what precipitated it was merely that their own plans had, owing to her engagement, become definite and final. They were to leave—she, Lady Tenby, and Ted, about whom there was

no longer any difficulty—before the New Year, and spend a month in the winter snows of high Alps ; and since the marriage was to take place before Lent, it was clear that the weeks intervening would be full. The imps therefore, if they were to come at all, must come now.

The twenty-four hours that had elapsed since she had given her “yes” had been full of a great happiness and content to the girl. She had long held Ted in strong friendship and affection, and the quality of his love for her, now that he could speak of it, seemed to her to supply a real want of her nature. It had awoke the womanliness in her to full life ; there was no question how much he wanted her, and the womanliness rose to his need, longing to be wanted. He was not very demonstrative : it would not have been like him if he had been ; but it was impossible not to be infected by his deep and quiet happiness. That morning, after the word was said, and after they had told Lady Tenby, they went down to his room on the ground-floor, and sat there together till the repetition of the luncheon-bell recalled them to the ordinary affairs of life. What passed was of the most trivial : once he got up to adjust the fire, and she, laughing at his clumsiness, took the tongs from him and disposed the coals herself, covering his hands with hers. Once a telegram came for him, asking him to play golf next day, and, having replied, he showed her the proposal, saying, “I think the man must be mad.” After that she came and sat on the arm of his chair, and traced with her little finger the lines of a scar on his forehead, where he had once, so he told her now, fallen against the fender in his room, cutting it to the bone. She blamed him for going into the room in the dark ; he had to promise not to do it again. It was all trivial, yet now it was all momentous. Or, the mid-morning post arriving, she found a letter from the architect of the addition to the

house at High Beach, saying that the rooms were quite dry and fit for paper. That led them back to High Beach, to the day when she had brought the imps to tea, to the day when he began his bathing—he would have to make a far longer season of it next year—to the evening when he had insisted on coming out and seeing her home, in spite of his cold. Then for a moment the talk became serious.

“That was when I began to love you,” he said. “I didn’t begin to love till then.”

“Oh, Ted, is it as much as that ?” she asked

“More than that. And you ?”

“I began when I began to see you loved me,” she said. “So it was your fault. Oh, how I wanted to be wanted ! That’s what a woman loves, I think.”

“I can give you that,” said he—“lots of that.”

With Violet all this was like a young bird learning to fly : it can learn because in its nature it knows. She had trusted to that latent knowledge, had let herself forth into the empty air, and, behold, her pinions already fluttered, sustaining her. The romance of the great flights was not hers yet : she could not shoot upwards like a flung jewel through the divided air, nor swoop in flame-like streaks from sunlit vaults of azure to the exultant earth. But each moment they spent together was, so to speak, another tentative flight ; each moment taught her more of the power within her. She found, too, that nothing unintelligible, nothing mysterious, was demanded of her. The real and ordinary world, its trifles, its pleasures and interests, did not sink out of sight because she had taken his hand, had kissed him, had smoothed his hair from over the healed white scar. True, it was a new world she was entering, but the old one was not left behind. The fire still wanted attending to, and the new rooms at High

Beach were still of interest. He wanted her ; she knew she could fulfil his needs ; she was filling them now, just by being herself.

After lunch they went out together in the motor ; the grey autumn days had given place to winter and crystalline weather, and the air was keen and vigorous.

"Oh, let's have it open," said she. "We can put on all the furs there are, right up over our ears."

Lady Tenby, seeing them off, gave her large laugh.

"There'll be no need to announce the engagement, you darlings, if you don't," she said. "Ted and you driving alone together will be quite sufficient."

"Anyhow, you shan't come with us, Aunt Maggie," said the girl.

"No, you blessed child. Be back before it's dark, won't you ? I should like to wrap you both up in cotton-wool and lock you into your rooms, for fear of any accident happening to either of you, now."

"We didn't matter so much before ; is that it ?" asked Violet, putting on her big sable cloak, which even she allowed was rather an extravagance.

"Not nearly so much ! Ted always goes to sleep in a motor. Perhaps you will be able to keep him awake for once."

It turned out to be colder than they had expected, and after entering the Roehampton gate, they got out for a warming tramp across the Park, to be met again beyond the Penn Ponds by the Kingston Gate. The heat of the sun had not been sufficient all day to melt the heavy hoarfrost of the night before, and the blades of grass were loaded with its diamond spears, and the fallen dead leaves of oak were stuck together in queer brown packets by the particles of frozen stuff. Here a herd of fallow deer moved stiffly away at their approach, or a company of red deer, bolder, stood their ground in the russet bracken till they

had passed. The lakes were lightly frozen over, and below the thick sheltering banks of rhododendron, where the sun struck more warmly, varnishing the leaves with melted frost, were companies of queer foreign geese and peacock-winged ducks. Where the ice had been broken stood a heron : he got up with wooden clatterings and bow-bent wings before them. And all these sights and sounds were not in any way transfigured. They were woven into the happiness of the two, just as they were—not, by some process of alchemy, turned into gold at all, but remaining the sweet, wholesome things of daily life. There was nothing mysterious suddenly come to birth, so Violet thought. It just made her very happy to be with Ted—he with his longing for her ; she most content to give him herself, to take care of him, to have him for her own. She had no misgivings at all : she was not at all disappointed. It was all divinely satisfactory.

They were both well warmed when they joined the motor again by the Kingston Gate, and got quickly into their furs, and pulled the rug high about them to keep in the heat. Under cover of it, just as it was being finally tucked in round them, he found her hand, and took it into his with a secret pressure of his fingers. To that, too, she loved to give reply.

“ Oh, Ted, my dear,” she said, “ what a nice walk—just you and me ! Yes, home,” she called to the chauffeur.

He did not let go her hand, but gently unfastened the buttons of her glove, so that his fingers could clasp the warm skin of her wrist.

“ It is to ‘ home ’ that we are going to-day,” he said. “ And this evening we are not going out, are we ? ”

His fingers for a moment touched some ticklish place on her wrist, and she gave a little start, then rubbed her wrist hard against his hand.

“ It’s nothing, dear,” she said, “ but for one moment it

tickled so dreadfully." Then she thrust her other hand also into his, lest he should think this hand-caress was distasteful to her.

"More buttons to be undone," she said. "Ted, what a big, gentle hand you have got! You could crush both of mine together into a ball like bits of paper. This evening? I think we have tickets for some theatre. But why should we go? Would you sooner stop at home?"

"So much sooner. Perhaps—perhaps mother would like to go. No doubt she could find some one who would use our tickets. You see, we have got such a lot to talk about."

"Yes, and it's Christmas in a few days. Oh, I want the imps to spend it with us. Would you mind? I meant to speak about it before, but—but other things, you know—!"

"Excellent. I love Christmas with children. One plays games nominally to amuse them, really to amuse oneself."

"I know. Let's have all the old games again, Santa Claus, and Father Christmas, and snap-dragon, and Christmas-tree, and crackers at dinner. What a pity one can't make grown-up people happy as easily as one can make children!"

"But you can make grown-up people the happiest of all," said he.

"Anyhow, Aunt Maggie can turn us all into children again," said Violet. "She was just like a child herself, too, to-day. Really, Ted, I almost think I could marry you to please her alone, leaving you and me out of the question."

"But we're not left out of the question," he said, undoing the last button of her glove.

"No, not exactly."

The breeze, such as there was of it, met them full in the face as they turned down the hill towards the Roehampton

Gate again, and this, added to the wind of their movement, made talking difficult. So, as they slid downhill past the open spaces of hoar-covered grass, already in shadow, there was silence, but the silence was one of intimacy. The buzz of the engines was still : only there was the shrill monotone of the meeting wind, the sharp crunch of the wheels on the hard, frozen road. Here and there stood some big leafless oak close to the roadside, and as they passed it, the noise of their going was echoed back for an instant from its stalwart trunk. Occasionally a fallen branch snapped under the wheels, or a flicked stone leaped against the splash-board. Violet half closed her eyes—the wind made them smart a little—and watched the woodland and open spaces slide by on each side with heart full of a wonderful sense of security and content. Her two hands lying together in Ted's seemed a sort of symbol of her safety ; she would never be lonely any more, never feel that strange sense of isolation that had lain so chilly round her one night at High Beach. Ted would be always next her ; his hand would always encompass hers. And she turned her head towards him, longing to thank him, if only by a look or a smile which, though her mouth was hidden by the collar of her sable cloak, he would guess, would know of. . . .

She looked at him ; his mouth was a little parted, his eyes tight shut. It was clear that he was fast asleep.

For one moment she felt a sudden chill of disappointment. But at the next there was nothing left of it. He had got warm with his tramp, and there was nothing so sleep-compelling as to get back into a carriage after walking on a cold day, and to meet the wind. Only a couple of days before, in similar circumstances, she and Lady Tenby had nodded like a pair of Chinese mandarins all the way home. Nothing was more natural than that he should doze. . . . Then came a strong reaction from

that first mistaken feeling of chill. It was somehow extraordinarily sweet that Ted should fall asleep like that with her hands in his. Anyone could sit in a motor with anybody else and keep awake. But that he who loved her, holding her hands so, should sleep, was delicious. It gave her a sudden thrill of tenderness towards him.

Two mornings later the imps made their hurricane entrance. Though they had not been able to arrange to leave before breakfast, they left immediately after, and arrived at South Street in a state of famine and excitement. Lady Tenby, as has been already mentioned, was not regarded by either of them with liking, but a violent argument in the train, which had begun by Polly's declaring that she should be rude to her every day, had suddenly turned in Lady Tenby's favour by Jack discovering that if Miss Allenby married Ted, Lady Tenby would belong to Miss Allenby, which put an entirely different complexion on the affair. She became one of Miss Allenby's "things," and could no more be treated with disrespect than could Miss Allenby's books or boots.

The imps had the carriage to themselves, for, by a pre-concerted plan, they had bolted on the sound of the whistle from the compartment where the nurse had settled herself, and ran to this one, three doors farther on, which they had seen to be empty. Before settling down to argue, they had gone in visionary expeditions to all those places of which photographs appeared in the carriage. The ways sometimes were dark and slippery, and Jack's buttons on one occasion got so dreadfully mixed up with the netting of the hat-rack that it was doubtful whether the block of carriages would not have to be taken to South Street entire. Then they put their heads very far out of the window, and shrieked encouragement to their nurse.

"Because you can't punish people in other people's houses," said Jack. "You can only punish them at home."

It was this that had put Polly's idea of being rude to Lady Tenby into her head.

"Jolly!" she said. "Then I shall put my tongue out at Lady Tenby every day, and contradict her whatever she says."

"Why?" asked Jack.

"Because I hate her, silly. She was bad enough at High Beach. Now that she's taken Miss Allenby away, she's worse."

"Perhaps she'll die soon," said Jack.

"Huh! Not she! I believe she's a witch."

Jack's eyes grew large and round.

"Couldn't we tip her into the river and find out?" he asked.

"I expect she'd suspect something if we asked her to come out by the river," said Polly. "No, the only thing is to be rude."

Jack was standing on the seat, and jumped backwards and forwards two or three times from one to the other before answering.

"The only thing is——" he began.

"It isn't," said Polly.

"Oh, shut up! It is. You see, Miss Allenby's going to be Lady Tenby too. The witch will sort of belong to her."

"Witches don't belong to anybody but the devil," said Polly, with decision. "And I wish he'd send for her."

This authoritative theology arrested Jack's jump in mid-air, and he came down on the floor.

"But she can't help belonging to Miss Allenby too," he said. "And you can't be rude to Miss Allenby's things. Or try and see if they'd be drownded."

Polly frowned.

“ Say it again, Jack,” she said.

Jack said it again, with a clause reserving the rights of the devil.

“ It is a pity,” said Polly. “ But we needn’t like her.”

“ No, but we must pretend to, ’cause she’s one of Miss Allenby’s things. We didn’t like Miss Allenby’s black stockings, when she bathed in them, but we had to pretend to.”

Polly flattened her small nose against the window-pane.

“ Perhaps Lady Tenby’s improved,” she said.

“ Or she may have got worse,” said Jack.

“ Well, I suppose we shall have to have *pax* with her,” said Polly. “ But it is a pity.”

So, an hour later, they were having a substantial meal of cake and milk under Lady Tenby’s supervision. She pretended that she was very hungry too, and ate microscopical pieces of cake and drank infinitesimal sips of milk, in the hope of adding to the general sense of feasting. In this she signally failed, since both Jack and Polly saw through her false appetite, though they could not understand what could be the object of the pretence. If you were hungry, you ate large pieces in rapid succession : Lady Tenby took tiny crumbs, and made a great many movements with her jaws. But the politeness due to Miss Allenby’s “ *things* ” was inviolable.

“ And when did you say Miss Allenby would be in ?” asked Polly for the third time. It was impossible to be so polite as not to be anxious about her return.

“ By lunch-time, dear,” said Lady Tenby. “ She had a lot of shopping to do, and I think an appointment with a fairy.”

“ Which one ?” asked Jack.

“ She told me, but I forgot. Abra—something.”

"I expect you mean Abracadabra," said Polly, carefully keeping all contempt out of her voice.

"It was Abracadabra. Now, have we all finished, and shall we go for a walk till Miss Allenby comes back? Would you like to go in the Park, and see the trees with the frost on them, and the Serpentine?"

"What's that?" asked Jack.

"The lake: it will be all frozen over. Or shall we go in the streets and look at the shops?"

"But Miss Allenby won't be back before we are, will she?" asked Polly. "You see, it would be such a pity to miss any of her."

"No, you duck! I believe you are as fond of her as I am. Well, shops or Park?"

"Oh, shops!" said Polly. "And shall we tell her, Jack? She might help us." (This was in an aside.)

"What about?" said Jack, very audibly.

"Hush! About a present for Miss Allenby. She could help us choose."

It was settled that this privilege should be given Lady Tenby, and as they started down South Audley Street, the great problem was laid before her. An entire shilling was to be expended over Miss Allenby's Christmas present, so it was important to see all that the best shops contained. The ideal was a clockwork motor-car which ran in small buzzing circles when wound up, like the one that Jessie Bywater had. It came from London, so perhaps there might be another one, if Lady Tenby knew where to look for it. But Polly had qualms about the price. On the box of the one owned by the fortunate Jessie there was a ticket half torn off, but faintly decipherable. And the fatal figure looked like half a crown.

Lady Tenby's appreciation of the seriousness of this point rather raised her in the imps' eyes, and her manœuvre of hailing a taxicab and driving to a toyshop

in Oxford Street earned their highest approval. She seemed to have improved since she became one of Miss Allenby's things. But then, unfortunately, by one fatal error, she lost all the ground she had gained. For there was a clockwork motor-car just like Jessie Bywater's, but, alas! it cost, not two and sixpence, but three and sixpence. On which Lady Tenby made her deplorable mistake.

"I know what," she said, just as if it was a good idea : "let's give it her between us—you and Jack and me."

Polly put it down as if it had been hot, and turned red.

"Oh, thank you very much," she said, "but I don't think that would be the same thing. You see, we want to give it her quite by ourselves. Let's look for something else, Jack."

Lady Tenby waited, and said something in a whisper to the shop-man, and Polly had opportunity for another aside with Jack.

"She doesn't understand *at all*," she said.

"Not one thing," said Jack.

They strayed through a fairyland of lovely objects : cows that mooed, dogs that barked, cheerful tin canaries that hopped and squeaked, balloons warranted to leave the ground, dolls that opened and shut their eyes, china hens sitting on nests full of sugar-plum eggs ; but the glory of these things was faint in the light of the unattainable motor-car. A minute or two later Lady Tenby came hurrying after them.

"Polly and Jack," she said, "the man tells me that you may have the motor-car for a shilling because it's Christmas."

Polly gave a great sigh.

"Oh, that *is* kind of him!" she said. "Jack, isn't it kind?"

"Let's go and thank him," said Jack.

This was solemnly done, and, overwhelmed with sur-

feited desire and gratitude, the imps bore their spoil away. It was lucky that they did not know to whom their gratitude was really due.

Enchanted days followed. Even the despised Park was magical when they walked with Miss Allenby by the Serpentine, and she told them how the ducks spent Christmas, and how, owing to continued errors in diet, the great fat wood-pigeons were never able to eat mincepies. It had seemed odd, too, at first, that the sun was so red, and most interesting to have it explained that he was red with passion, because Abracadabra sent him to bed earlier and earlier every night, so that her fairies, who only came out after it was dark, might have a longer time to get through their work of storing the Christmas presents for each house on the roof. Thus Santa Claus, who only worked for one night during the whole year, might be able to bring them down and put them in the stockings. Otherwise, if presents came dropping in throughout the night of Christmas Eve, he would be continually going backwards and forwards, and not be able to get through his work by morning. Abracadabra had arrived a week ago, in her pink satin cloak and yellow brocaded dress, and Miss Allenby had seen her twice. She had certainly grown since last year, though she was many thousands of years old already. And Aunt Maggie and Ted had both seen her in South Street making notes of the numbers of the houses in her diamond pocket-book with the emerald pencil. Yes, she had looked at Number 96, but it was never certain whether she would pay a visit in person or not. She always examined the dustbin before she came into any house, and if she found many bits of temper or disobedience there she went on to the next house.

Jack had refused to leave his hot bath the evening before, after his ten minutes were up, and though he did

not know whether Miss Allenby knew about this, he felt a little uneasy.

"Does she see very little bits?" he asked.

"She has eyes like microscopes," said Miss Allenby.

Polly put her hand into Ted's, who this morning was of the party.

"Nurse told me this morning," she said, with odious superiority, "that I hadn't given her any trouble at all since I came to London."

"That's good," said he.

Miss Allenby spoke pointedly and very clearly to Jack.

"Eyes like microscopes," she repeated; "and if there happens to be the least little bit of priggishness in the dustbin, like being conceited because you've been good, she doesn't trouble to look at all, because she smells that. And then she covers her handkerchief with fairy eau-de-Cologne, and puts a large black mark against the door, and goes straight on to the next house. And instead of coming herself again on Christmas evening, she sends a large packet of toothache and earwigs by the parcel post, addressed very clearly to the person she means them for."

Polly cleared her throat.

"Will you go on about the red sun, Miss Allenby dear?" she asked.

It was late on the night of Christmas Eve, and Violet had come to Lady Tenby's room to fill and stitch up the Santa Claus stockings for the imps. They had been in bed several hours already, but excitement had kept them awake, and their nurse had promised to knock at Lady Tenby's door when they went to sleep, so that the stockings might be put in place by Santa Claus without detection. Snow, rare and delicious Christmas decoration, had fallen during the afternoon, but they had all been busy

indoors, making the wreaths of evergreen and holly to put over lintels. They had worked in the hall, spreading a sheet over the carpet, and afterwards the scraps that remained over had been put into the fire, filling the house with the crackle and aromatic smell of burned leaves. The stockings, of course, were to contain only those smaller and less bulky gifts which Santa Claus deals in—chocolates and silvered apples, and squeaky animals, and the like: Abracadabra was to bring the larger gifts in a basket (exactly like a clothes-basket in shape), but quite clearly made of pure gold.

Violet put two or three large stitches through the top of Jack's stocking. It was a strangely malformed leg that subtended, full of curves and bumps and hard angles, quite unlike Jack's shapeliness.

"Oh, I am having a happy Christmas," she said. "I only hope the imps are enjoying themselves. It's the first Christmas I've ever had with children to make happy. I was governess last year to some rather severe children who didn't care about fairies."

"Poor wretches!" said Lady Tenby, also stitching.

"In fact, I haven't had a real Christmas since my father died. He used to play all the nice games—wreaths and Santa Claus and Abracadabra. It's—it's like finding home again."

"Ah, you darling! And you are happy?"

Violet was sitting on the hearthrug in front of the fire. She finished her stocking, and leaned back against Lady Tenby's knees.

"Yes, Aunt Maggie, I am most awfully happy. I don't think I could be happier. Yes, I know I shall be—at least, I believe that—when Ted and I are husband and wife; but this is the best I've known yet. I suppose it's most of it Ted, but that doesn't take away the tremendous lot there is of you."

She gave a great sigh, chiefly of content, but with something mixed with it, to which she gave voice.

"And when we're married," she said, "you won't leave us altogether, will you? I mean you will be with us a great deal, I hope: I hope more than that. I hope you will be with us just as much as before."

And then, for the first time since her plan had turned out so successfully, since her falsehood had borne such wholesome fruit, Lady Tenby felt a sudden misgiving. It conveyed itself to her physically in a sort of sinking and slipping away of something inside her. She knew well how differently Violet regarded her from the mother-in-law of common humour, but she had not quite hoped for or feared this. And the girl went on, serenely unconscious.

"I feel sure Ted wishes it too," she said; "for only the other day he said something about you which implied your living with us. What was it? Oh yes: I spoke about Chevely—isn't it lucky? the tenants' lease comes to an end this quarter, and of course we shan't renew it—and he said that there was a room next to your old sitting-room which he thought I should like best, so that you might keep yours. Something of that sort, and he said it so unconsciously. I loved that, because it answered my unconscious thought, that you would be with us there. I love one's unconscious thoughts being spoken by—well, in my case, by him. It shows how deeply we are at one."

But the knowledge that they both wanted her to be still with them—that, even worse, they both took it for granted—gave Lady Tenby, in spite of the warmth of personal affection, a strange and awful chill. It ought not, she knew quite well, to have occurred to either of them that she should continue with them. It was not natural: they ought, if passion had truly entered into them and taken its rightful possession of them, to have been

wrapped up in each other, selfish in their triumphant self-surrender, regardless of others. She had hoped, honestly hoped, that they would be, and were being, disregardant of her. . . . Had Violet been engaged to Frank, would they both have assumed that Mrs. Winthrop and her husband and the imps would make their home with them ? But it was necessary to answer ; it was necessary also not to betray the chill of her heart, but show only the surface warmth that the proposal must naturally have produced.

“ You darling !” she said ; “ you and he are both darlings. But you must make no arrangements for me. Wait till you are married, dear. Wait till you know how self is swallowed up in the other self. I love your both thinking of me, but I shall equally love the fact that you neither of you think of me. I shall love that fact best, Violet. It will show I was right——”

She broke off suddenly.

“ In your thinking of Ted and me, not separately, but together ?” said the girl. “ Yes, of course you were right. Don’t we prove it ? Aren’t we tremendously happy ?”

She gave another little sigh, still not quite of content. She felt she was striving to reach, to be worthy of, her friend.

“ Oh, Aunt Maggie, Aunt Maggie,” she said. “ What I told the imps in fun is so seriously true. I told them that Abracadabra had grown so much, for fear they should think Abracadabra was me. They will never guess it is you. And that is so true, not in fun, but in earnest. You are so big, you are so big. You can contemplate Ted and me saying we don’t want to be bothered with you, and feel nothing but gladness because it is so. If we just sent a note, saying that you would not be wanted after the nineteenth of February, or whenever it is, and must make other arrangements by then, you would be only delighted. Oh, I know you ; I thank God every day that I know you.”

A discreet tap came at the door, and Violet gave admittance.

"The children are asleep, my lady," said the nurse.

Violet got up.

"Why, it's after twelve," she said. "Merry Christmas to you, nurse. And will you hang these two stockings at the heads of their beds. That's for Polly, the other for Jack."

The nurse closed the door softly behind her, for fear of disturbing the sleep of the imps, and Violet turned with hands outstretched to her friend.

"Aunt Maggie," she said. "Merry Christmas. Many of them, all merry. Dear, what is the matter ?"

For Lady Tenby had covered her face with her hands, and was sobbing. Then she made a great effort with herself, and the effort she made was against her best self. It was successful.

"Oh, Violet," she said. "Mayn't one cry for happiness ? It is the best reason for crying. And does this Christmas remind you of home, and of Christmases when you were little ? Ah ! what is that ?"

A few doors off there came the sound of singing, and Violet went to the window and drew the blind. Two old folk, man and woman, were passing down the street, seen dimly through the thick-falling snow. They sang in quavering unison :

"Oh come, all ye faithful,
Joyful and triumphant,
Come ye, oh, come ye . . ."

Then the woman's voice failed, and the feeble old bass continued alone.

Violet rang the bell.

"Oh, have you some money, Aunt Maggie ?" she said. "I haven't a sou. Yes, ten shillings will do. Poor old

things ! I wish it wasn't so cheap. But they can go somewhere now, can't they, and get to bed ?"

The bell was answered, and the alms bestowed.

"Yes, it reminds me of when I was little," said Violet quickly. "It reminds me of the time after my father died, when we couldn't give more than a few coppers. But it was nicer to give then than to give now. It cost something. That is better than nothing costing anything. But I am so happy. I can't help that."

She pushed her hair back from her forehead.

"I suppose we must go to bed," she said. "But that brought up old days so tremendously. Oh, Aunt Maggie, Aunt Maggie !"

Lady Tenby had quite recovered herself.

"And it ought to suggest new days, my dear," she said. "The Santa Claus stockings are hung up for the imps, but oh, Violet, what when you sew up the stockings again for your own children ? Boy and girl, I hope, one of each sort, first of all. And then, my darling, more boys and more girls. After you have been called 'mother,' what is the nicest name of all ? Why, grandmother, grandmother ! In lodgings by the seaside, if you like ! Who cares ? I shan't."

She gave a great loud laugh.

CHAPTER XI

VIOLET was sitting one day at the end of April on the stone terrace that ran along the garden-front at Chevely, on a morning of heavenly spring sunshine and warm budding wind from the south-west. They had been here a month now since their return from their honeymoon, and already she felt the root-fibres of her nature had burrowed deep in the place, giving her the sense of home. The terrace faced south, so that the caressing sunshine warmed her, and the west wing of the L-shaped Jacobean house sheltered her from the wind that roared, not fiercely, nor with yellings, but with genial strength, in the trees of the rookery that lay beyond the garden. The elm-flower had been thick upon them, and now the terrace walk was dotted with the little pink and green sequins which the wind had blown from them and scattered over the ground, and the mist of the earliest green leaves was spread round them ; they were caught in the verdant net of their own weaving. Below the terrace ran a deep herbaceous border, gay with the predominant yellows and blues of the early months of the flower-year ; from the edge of that the great lawn stretched in unbroken carpet of emerald across the broad gravel path which ran to meet the walk which went out at right angles from the end of the terrace. Beyond, again, was a strip of rougher grass which bordered the rookery, planted thick with daffodils, early tulips, and brown speckled fritillaries. This morning they were all ablaze, and Violet had spent half an hour walking to and

fro there with Ted feasting on the riot of colour, and the nods and smiles of that brilliant company. After that she had gone with him through the rookery, where, overhead, tremendous businesses were being transacted by the birds in the nodding tree-tops, and out into the park, where just now he was equally busy, though not so talkative, in laying out a golf-links. The soil was suitably sandy, the turf of short-napped velvet, and Violet had impressed upon him that he must make himself responsible for a really good course. It could be done as long as you did not spare pains or money : he must supply the one—the most important one, she told him—she would supply the other. And she had left him then trying “distances” for a short hole, where the green was to be beset by Scyllas and Charybdises of the choicest sort. There was a pond, a big clump of rushes, an old gravel quarry. Somewhere in the midst of these delectable horrors was the green to be set. No other shot except the absolute right one was going to be any good. He had explained that to her several times.

Aunt Maggie had gone up to town two days before for what she called her “spring-cleaning.” That meant a visit to a doctor, who invariably gave her an excellent account of herself, another to a dentist, who generally was equally encouraging, and, duty being thus done, several visits to dressmakers and hat-shops. It may be remembered that she had spent not more than three and sixpence on dress in the autumn, and consequently these would be pleasurable errands. She and Violet had had several discussions on these subjects, and Violet had been profoundly unsatisfactory. She dressed quite deliciously (Aunt Maggie allowed that), but she was not thrilled over it, whereas Aunt Maggie—aged a hundred and three—affirmed that she would get Dr. Evans to give her a bottle of bromide to calm her. Hats made her heart beat.

So Aunt Maggie was happy and busy, and Ted was

happy and busy, and Violet, as she strolled back underneath the city of rooks, after seeing him put one ball into the quarry and the next into the pond, thought that she was very happy too, but rather wished that she was busier. Aunt Maggie spared her all trouble in household affairs, which was very dear of her, and very characteristic, but Violet would so much have liked to be given a little trouble. Aunt Maggie, for instance, at the beginning, had engaged all the servants while she and Ted were still on their honeymoon, and had come down here a week before they got back, so that on their return they might find the house a "going concern," and not have to experience the discomforts of settlers. Then, naturally enough, Violet had no experience of the management of a big house, and her mother-in-law had continued to hold the reins, till, by dint of watching her excellent driving, she might take her place on the box-seat. That was all very kind and delightful of Aunt Maggie, and she had announced with triumph, the morning before she left for town, that she had had a great interview with the chef, and had arranged their menu for all the days on which she was to be absent. So Violet need not even set eyes on him, or give a thought to kitchen affairs. It was all settled.

It was the same in other departments. In old days it appeared that Lady Tenby, capable woman as she was, had looked after stable affairs as well, and she was more than willing to do it again, and both chauffeur and groom came to her for their orders every morning. So, too, in the garden, where, perhaps, her knowledge and experience were most useful of all. She knew where to buy her bulbs, where to buy her rose-trees, and which nursery-gardeners specialized in the culture of individual seeds. Already she had made a thousand improvements : had grassed over the old rose-garden, which, owing to its situation, could never be satisfactory; and was digging a new one in a more propitious

situation. The lawn-tennis court, too, had never been properly levelled ; that was done, and would be fit to play on by June. And, though her reign was as supreme as if she had been master and mistress of the house, she always appeared to ask leave for her manœuvres, and make suggestions only. In the matter of the old rose-garden, for instance, even the suggestion appeared to come from Violet, for, walking with her there, Aunt Maggie had merely lamented that the roses never did well, and Violet had suggested making a new one. She had hailed this as a brilliant idea, and asked Violet if she thought the piece of ground beyond the tennis-court would do. But when they went there subsequently, the piece of ground in question was discovered to have a quantity of pegs stuck about over it ; Aunt Maggie, so she said, could not understand how they had got there, and plucked them up. But when they came to draw out a diagram of the beds (this Aunt Maggie did, though it was only a suggestion) the position of the pegs, so far as Violet recollects them, seemed somewhat significant. Or, again, she would ask Violet if she might take out the big Mercedes, as she wanted to run over to Oxford. Violet was delighted that she should, and the big Mercedes came round in about one minute and a quarter, exactly on the stroke of half-past two, just as if it had already been ordered. But the instances in which she made little slips like this—they seemed like little slips—were rare ; even then there was no certainty about them, and Violet told herself that she was absurd to wonder or conjecture at all about such trifles, when she was so sure of the prevailing kindness and affection that dictated these rulings.

She passed beneath the swaying city of the rooks, and came out again on the decorated meadow. There were two gardeners there, who had come since she had passed through with Ted half an hour before, and were measuring

with a tape. As in the inexplicable case of the rose-garden, there were already a number of pegs scattered about the grass. Violet asked them what they were doing, and learned that Lady Tenby had ordered them to cut a polygon of flower-beds here. It was the first she had heard of it.

Now, Chevely belonged to Ted—that was quite true—and in the old days no doubt Aunt Maggie used to order things exactly as she chose. But it appeared to Violet that the case was a little different now. She did not want to be unreasonable, but, considering that it was she who made it possible for them to live at Chevely at all, it struck her that she might have been consulted. The upkeep of the house and gardens was entirely her province ; she paid for the measuring gardeners ; she would pay for the flowers that would embellish this not inconsiderable piece of ground ; moreover, there was nothing in the place which she loved so much as that meadow of daffodils and tulips. It really seemed not unreasonable that she should expect to be consulted. Both she and Ted had hoped and desired that Aunt Maggie would make her home with them, but it seemed rather that Aunt Maggie was allowing them to make their home with her.

And then, metaphorically speaking, Violet boxed her own ears. Aunt Maggie should turn the rose-garden into a swimming-tank, if she chose, and, if she chose, grow mushrooms in the hall. She was ashamed of her own pettiness of view, when that great shining example of all that was big-minded and fine of heart was associated with her. It was because Aunt Maggie was so big that she had not thought of consulting Violet about this little adaptation of the garden. And as for her own horrible little moment of self-justification, when she told herself that it was she who paid for the gardeners and for the flowers that would blossom in the converted meadow, Violet blushed for it.

The second post, which also brought the morning papers, had arrived when she got back to the house, and she took her portion of it, with the *Daily Telegraph*, out on to the terrace, where the sun was warm and the position wind-sheltered. There were two or three letters of no particular importance, a small packet containing her pass-book, which had been to the bank and was now returned ; and, without looking at that or the rather formidable sheaf of cheques that accompanied it, she opened the paper. There, too, was little that claimed attention : somebody had flown a mile or two farther than anyone had flown before ; politicians were calling each other liars with a vehemence that was rather more unveiled than was customary with them ; and she ran her eyes down the column of the doings of London day by day. Certain folk had come to town ; certain others had gone away ; and the Dowager Lady Tenby had been for a day or two at her house in South Street, where she had entertained a few friends to dinner once or twice. Violet was delighted at that ; she hoped it had been amusing. Apparently—so the paper said—there were several delightful people, and more came in afterwards. Dear Aunt Maggie !

There was still the pass-book to look at, and, since there were several letters she ought to write, she embraced any occupation which would allow her to stay out of doors a little while longer before doing the things she ought to do. Her lawyer had told her to send her pass-book to the bank every month, and this she had religiously done, though she could not see what good it did. Aunt Maggie had laughed at her for her constancy : she had a pass-book, she supposed, somewhere, but it certainly had not been to the bank for years. Pass-books only reminded you of what you had spent, which, on the whole, was disagree-

able. Since you had spent it, it did no good to be reminded of how much richer you would have been if you had not. Violet's volume was satisfactory. She had been spending a great deal, but everything seemed to be on the right side. That new wing at High Beach had been enormously expensive ; so, too, had been their honeymoon in the Mediterranean, where she had chartered an extremely comfortable yacht. But the size of certain of these figures seemed to her a symbol of her happiness, and everything had been so cheap, since they had been so happy. And then suddenly the smile that had uncurled her mouth as she traversed the ground implied by these numerals wavered and grew doubtful, over what was in comparison quite a small item. On March 25, apparently, "Tenby," as the entry concisely gave it, had drawn five hundred pounds. For a moment she did not know what this meant. Had she given some cheque to Ted for any purpose ? The sheaf of cheques would soon make that clear.

There was no such cheque among them, but there was the slip charging her with the payment to Lady Tenby's account. Then Violet remembered : it was the quarterly payment of five hundred pounds, the correct fraction of that two thousand pounds which she had really forced Aunt Maggie to accept when she went to South Street last autumn, as boarder, so to speak, in her house.

Violet frowned a little, wrinkling her eyes up against the glare of the sun that struck rather sharp and dazzling on the white of the terrace. Surely there must be some mistake. She had agreed—insisted, indeed—on paying this very adequate sum while she was Aunt Maggie's guest, but since the end of December both Aunt Maggie and Ted had been hers. Ted enjoyed as pocket-money now half the income on which he had to live before : Aunt Maggie's jointure in the same way was pocket-money to her ; the

rest of the expenses for house and stables and general upkeep were paid by Violet. Was she, then, in addition to that, making Aunt Maggie a private allowance of five hundred pounds a quarter ?

Of course it was her own fault ; she should have revoked the order on her bank, and she had omitted to do so. But it was odd that Aunt Maggie had not noticed this sudden influx of cash, now a month ago. And then, with a sigh of relief, she remembered Aunt Maggie's remarks about the insignificance of pass-books : how she had said she supposed she had one, but had not seen it for ages. Of course that was the explanation. Aunt Maggie was still as ignorant of this payment on March 25 as Violet herself had been till a few minutes ago. But she felt as if she, her own mind, had had a narrow escape, and that the thought of Aunt Maggie's ignorance had rescued her only just in time. She was so nearly thinking that Aunt Maggie was continuing to receive this money knowingly, though the arrangement which gave it her had been obsolete since they had all gone abroad after Christmas. For it had come to an end, not only here, but in London also : Violet remembered so clearly the day before her marriage drawing a " general " cheque to Ted, which was to cover the household expenses for the month they had spent in town between the tour in Switzerland and the wedding. She remembered it because it was probably the last time that she would write her maiden name.

Another thought struck her, and she referred back in her book. Yes, she had given Aunt Maggie a cheque in November for the autumn quarter, and had written to her bank ordering quarterly payments till further notice. So five hundred pounds had been paid at the end of December and five hundred pounds more at the end of March.

Violet hardly knew what to do. Much the easiest and pleasantest course was to say nothing whatever about it.

She was delighted that Aunt Maggie should have the money, and if ever she condescended to have her pass-book made up, she would find herself pleasantly opulent. On the other hand, with her splendid independence of spirit, that had met comparative poverty so gallantly all those years, with so brave a show of being well supplied, might she not be rather indignant that Violet had smuggled these benefits upon her? But she resolved to chance that; she felt herself, in any case, quite incapable of going to Aunt Maggie, and saying that she was her debtor, owing to Violet's own negligence, to the extent of a thousand pounds.

She got up to go indoors, and write the few letters that had to be written, including now that one to her bank revoking the quarterly order, and, standing up, her eyes again fell on the gardeners at work with their pegs and measuring rods on the flower-starred grass. A third man had arrived with a wheelbarrow full of tools, and it was probable that they were going to set to work at once in cutting the beds. It seemed to Violet a cruelty she could not suffer, that those sunny daffodils, those chaliced tulips, those fairy-belled fritillaries should be cut down in the glory of their flowering; and, before going in, she went across the lawn again to find out whether orders had been given for the immediate cutting of the new flower-beds. She found that it was so, and debated with herself a moment as to whether she should give a counter-order or not. Then the great sense of spring that was abroad that day in the sun, and the warm rush of wind, and the glee of the decorated meadow, determined her. She would speak to Aunt Maggie about it when she came home this evening. Anyhow, the dear things should have one more day of spring and sun.

“Please don't begin the cutting to-day,” she said, “but leave it.”

The head man looked doubtful, hesitating.

"It was her ladyship's distinct orders, my lady," he said.

"I do not wish it done to-day," said Violet.

"Very good, my lady. And if you'd be so good as to tell her ladyship as it was by your orders that we stopped work here."

"Of course," said she.

A feeling that Violet had experienced once or twice before came over her again as she strolled back to the house. Though she felt that this sweet place had already become home to her, the gardener, the servants, the lodge-keepers, many of whom were old tenants and retainers, seemed to look on her as mistress by accident, not by right. The hint was conveyed in a thousand different ways, all so slight, yet to her, in her present mood, all so real. They took her orders, whenever she gave any, with perfect respect and obedience ; the lodge-keepers touched their hats, and their wives curtsied when they held the gates open for her to drive out, but she felt that she was not to them at all what Aunt Maggie was. It could not, of necessity, be so at first : it was but natural that they should feel for their old mistress—thus so delightfully restored to them, instead of the slightly aloof-minded tenants who had been in the place for the last three years—a feudal attachment which could only be the growth of years. But as long as Aunt Maggie still kept the reins (kindly, of course, and to save the younger woman trouble) in her own hands, it was difficult for Violet to begin to know these tenants and dependants, or to get into any relationship with them. If, for instance, she suggested visiting the lodge-keepers' wives or paying a call on Mrs. Whelley at the home-farm, she would be met by some such reply as this from Aunt Maggie :

"Oh, my dear, leave all that dull work to me. One

can't do much when one gets to be an old woman, but one can do that kind of thing. And Ted is longing to show you the two or three new holes he has had laid out. Besides, you'll see all the old folk at Ted's birthday-party in July: you will burst upon them all at once, like the moon coming out from a cloud. I'm the cloud, darling, and you're the moon."

All such tiny things as those—the affair of the rose-garden, for instance, this affair of the new beds—were small enough in themselves, but the effect they produced was cumulative. Once already Violet had dismissed other such things from her mind, with a blush of shame for herself, but they came back again, and slowly a question began to form itself. Could it be that Aunt Maggie was a little jealous of her position here as Ted's wife? Was she trying, just a little, to minimize that, and herself to retain the authority which by right belonged to Violet? To that question Violet returned an indignant negative. But she had asked it.

Ted came in to lunch, very late and serene and hungry. He had got the length of the short hole quite satisfactorily. It was clearly too difficult for a full shot, so he had made it an iron shot. With the wind against you, you would have to use a cleek; with the wind behind, a mashie would be sufficient. He had marked out a place for a big bunker in front of the green, so that you could not possibly run up to the hole. It had to be a pitch-shot, very high, or you would go into the rushes across the green. . . .

Violet had heard a good deal about this hole already, but, since it interested Ted, she did her best to preserve the high level of her enthusiasm about it.

"It sounds lovely," she said. "I know I should always go into the pond or the bushes or something."

"Oh no, not when you've learned the shot. What excellent ham! Yes, some more, please. It does make one hungry being out all morning. And what are your plans for the afternoon?"

"I was thinking of going out for a run in the motor. Will you come?"

"Yes, I should like to. I've done enough work to-day."

"That's capital," said Violet. "Please order the motor at half-past two, Raikes."

Raikes, like the gardener, hesitated.

"I got a post-card from her ladyship this morning, my lady," he said, "saying she wanted it to meet her at Didcot at half-past three."

"Oh, well, let's go for a spin, and meet her there with the car," said Violet to her husband. "The other car is in hospital, or I would send that."

"But do you want to go to Didcot?" asked he. "It's the dullest road in the world."

"No, it would be nicer to go somewhere else; but if Aunt Maggie has ordered the car——"

Ted made short work of this.

"Of course you shall go for your drive where you please," he said. "The brougham will meet her ladyship, Raikes. Tell them to start in good time; it takes a good hour. And the car at half-past two."

Raikes left the room to give these orders, and the two were alone.

"I don't mind about going out," said Violet, "if Aunt Maggie has ordered the car."

"Nonsense, darling! Mother will do very well with the brougham."

"If you are sure——" began she.

"Of course I'm sure. A little more apple-tart, dear!"

Ted was far too loyal to his mother to utter to Violet the criticism that had several times been in his mind—

namely, that Violet should (not exactly assert but) assume her proper position a little more, and nothing further was said on the subject. Lunch had been late; Ted's admirable appetite had somewhat unduly prolonged it, and they started almost immediately after. Though Violet delighted in the swiftest possible motion, Ted had a dislike of high speeds, and they took the ascent on to the big Wiltshire Downs and the broad level ribbon of road at the top with exemplary moderation. But for her there was a great fascination in these big open spaces, with their immense views of interlacing lines of hills and lonely upland valleys, and she was well content to make a leisurely progress. Now and then they dropped down from the tops into some nook, a wrinkle in the hills, where they passed through the tamer scenery of hedge-rows and trees, or where some small collection of a few dozen house-roofs clustering round a grey-towered church made a nameless hamlet of the hills; but soon they climbed again on to the tableland. The down grass, grey all the winter, was already shot with the livelier green of the young upspringing growth, and overhead, specks scarcely visible against the enormous sky, larks hung exulting. And somehow Violet found the scale and the size of things medicinal to her mind. All morning, she told herself, she had let herself dwell on little annoyances and disturbances, more than half, probably, the offspring of her own minuteness of vision, that peered and pried at trifles, and thus missed the broad aspects of life. She had been jealous about her rights, observant to see that they were duly paid her; she had been small and petty. And yet, and yet . . .

This would never do. She determined to confess all her little disturbances to Ted, and get him to confirm her in the view she wanted to take of them. His calm serenity of outlook never failed him; in anticipation she

could hear him say : " Oh, I don't think it's worth while bothering over little things like that, dear, is it ? I think you've been exaggerating it all a bit ; I should let it all slide." He was sure to be sane and quiet and reassuring.

" Ted dear," she began, turning to him.

He was fast asleep.

How well she remembered that happening before, on the afternoon of the day when they were engaged ! He had taken both her hands in his, and had fallen asleep so. On that occasion she had felt chilled for a moment, and then found an extraordinary tender pleasure in it. Now, somehow, that pleasure was absent. He had been out all morning, had eaten an excellent lunch, and had merely gone to sleep. There was nothing more to be said about it.

They had finally left the high ridge of down, and were sliding downhill with silent engines. The great breadth of sky and land was narrowed here : trees and hedgerows circumscribed the view, and before long, turning homewards, and still descending, they passed into the strip of primeval forest-land which was on the edge of the estate. Violet loved the place, and to-day, in this afternoon of spring-time, with the curled shoots of bracken nosing up among the dead débris of the winter, and the beeches powdered over with the minute green lichens of spring, and their branches starred with the myriad young leaves, it was so beautiful that she was half minded to wake Ted up. Then they came to more open spaces ; birches, those nymphs and dryads in the hierarchy of trees, stood in peaceful, white-stemmed companies, and presently after they came to the lake, from which flowed the stream that lower in its course passed through the garden at Chevely. The wind had gone down, and it lay an unrippled mirror to the sky. It was plentifully stocked with trout, and all over the lake

were the circles of their rising. And just then Ted awoke, and gazed at it with the glazed eye of the half-roused sleeper.

“ Trout,” he said.

Then, after a pause, he added, with sleepy solemnity, “ Grilled.”

Upon which he went to sleep again.

That was too much for Violet. For a little she shook with suppressed laughter, but suppression became impossible, and she laughed aloud. That woke Ted, who, when his pontifical remark was told him, joined with the utmost good-humour in the laugh against himself, and talked about his new golf-links all the way home.

Aunt Maggie (who since Violet’s accession often alluded to herself as “ The Dow ”) had already arrived when they got back, in tremendously good spirits.

“ You darlings ! How nice of you to go out a great Darby and Joan drive all by yourselves ! ” she said. “ I had written a post-card to Raikes, dear Violet, in order to save you trouble, telling them to send the motor to meet me, but, of course, the brougham did excellently. I had to leave one package at the station, but they will send it to-morrow. It contains nothing I shall want till then.”

“ The other motor was being tinkered,” said Ted ; “ and Violet wanted a drive.”

Lady Tenby made a barely perceptible pause.

“ Just what I was saying, dear,” she said. “ The brougham was all I could be expected to want. And how goes everything, Violet ? Have you and Ted been starved, or did I cater satisfactorily ? And how lovely the bulb meadow by the rookery is looking ! I just strolled out, and it is a perfect Fra Angelico place. It has come out tremendously these last three days.”

That was cleverly, even brilliantly, done. Lady Tenby had already seen the head-gardener, and had learned why the beds had not been cut according to her order. It was now necessary for Violet to tell her.

"Oh, Aunt Maggie," she said, "I am afraid I countermanded an order of yours.. I found them this morning just preparing to cut flower-beds in it, and I thought it was such a pity not to let the bulbs have their good time. I had no idea till then that you thought of making alterations there."

Lady Tenby saw that Ted was listening.

"But, darling, surely we talked over it together, did we not ?" she asked. "I thought you agreed. Or did I talk about it to Ted ?"

"Not me," said Ted.

"I think it was you, all the same," said Lady Tenby. "But probably you were not attending. You were thinking about the famous short hole, between Scylla and Charybdis, and the devil and the deep sea. Surely I discussed it with one of you. Or was it with you, Violet ?"

"It wasn't with me," repeated Ted, with something like the certainty that characterized the conversation of the imps. "Never heard about it till this moment. Otherwise I should have objected. The daffodils look pretty."

Lady Tenby laughed.

"The poor old Dow is catching it hot all round," she said. "But she has sinned in all innocence. I know I told one of you. But it does not in the least matter. Let us keep the Fra Angelico field just as it is. I am sure nothing could look lovelier now. Of course, when the bulbs die down, it will be rather rough and hayish. I only intended to make it gay for the summer. But if Violet and you are pleased with it as it is, why make any alteration ?"

"But in the summer we shall be in London," said Ted, "and after that at High Beach, shall we not?"

"Yes, dear; I was quite wrong," said Lady Tenby. "I only thought I was carrying out your wishes. It will save me a great deal of trouble not to have to superintend the plans I thought you approved of. I am delighted that you like it as it is."

Violet felt vaguely guilty.

"I never knew that you were thinking of making garden-beds there till this morning," she said. "Please, Aunt Maggie, do what you think best. I only meant the bulbs to have another day or two of flowering. They are so delicious, and they are enjoying themselves so much."

"So are we all," said Aunt Maggie—"at least, I am. What a waste of time to go to town at all! I grudged every minute of it, though I had a delightful time. Everyone pretended to be glad to see me, because they looked upon me as the sort of charwoman who cleans up the house before the real mistress comes. My arrival meant that Violet would soon follow."

She had swum out of this very largely and successfully, leaving, so she believed, the general impression that she had been doing her best, and, though her efforts were not appreciated, was far too big-minded to feel ill-used or misunderstood, or allow herself any littleness about little things. She gave the sense of forgetting about it all at once; she did more, for she made it seem as if there was nothing to forget. She had taken the same line, also, about being met, not with the motor, but with the brougham, which necessitated her leaving a piece of luggage behind. It was not of the slightest consequence.

But though superficially she was perfectly successful in putting the others faintly in the wrong, and then refraining from rubbing it in, the success did not really penetrate very deep. Violet would have been willing

to swear that she had heard nothing of the plan for the conversion of the flowery meadow till she saw the gardeners with their tools, and had she been seriously put to the question, she would have had to confess that she was not convinced that Ted had heard anything about it either. No doubt Aunt Maggie had meant to tell him, no doubt she had meant to tell her also, but in her candid and secret self Violet did not believe she had told either of them. But since there are thoughts which are impolite in themselves, just as words and actions may be impolite, she forebore to indulge in them. But at the moment she felt, for the first time definitely, a little mistrust of her friend. It was as if, somewhere in the great mansion of her affection and love for Aunt Maggie, a stone had slipped. There was no question of the whole edifice being threatened; it stood perfectly firm and unshaken. Only something quite unimportant had given way.

Lady Tenby's mind was as quick as a lizard—indeed, it was this very nimbleness of perception that made her so sympathetic a companion, for she could respond to feelings in a friend's mind which were hardly consciously known to the friend. Consequently, though Violet was unaware herself that there was the very slightest change in her manner to Aunt Maggie, Aunt Maggie was aware of it. Violet entered, as she thought, with all her usual zest into their future plans, and took quite as much interest in Aunt Maggie's little spring-cleaning in town as ever, but that lady detected a difference. She felt as if they were speaking to each other from opposite sides of a piece of tissue-paper. Nothing could be thinner; the voice and its inflection carried perfectly, but the effect was not quite that of speaking face to face. And as Lady Tenby, for excellent reasons of her own, was extremely anxious that no shadow of a barrier should stand between them, she took steps that evening when they went up to

bed to remove it. This she did with that air of almost brutal frankness which was the most disarming of her diplomatic tools. It was impossible not to respond to it with a similar absence of disguise or concealment.

She came, as she so often did, to Violet's bedroom, for a good-night talk, and, having arrived there, did not beat about the bush, but, blowing out her bedroom candle with the air of one who would not need it again just yet, went straight to the point.

"Now, darling, what's the matter?" she said. "Something has just disturbed you ever so little, so please tell me about it, unless it concerns absolutely yourself alone. But if I have any part in it, or if Ted has, I expect you might do worse than to talk it over with me."

Violet had not in the least expected this. As far as she knew she, Ted, and Aunt Maggie had all been absolutely their normal selves that evening. Ted had had a little nap, she herself had played the piano for half an hour, and they had had a particularly gay game of cork-pool.

"But I don't think there is anything the matter," she said.

Lady Tenby laughed.

"Well, I do," she said. "Let's have it all out, dear."

"But if there isn't anything?"

"Make it up, then—invent it, and tell me about it."

There she sat, genial and jolly, big of body, big of soul, irresistible. All the little disturbances that had vexed Violet that morning came fluttering to her again . . . like—like children's balloons, wanting to be pricked, to be allowed to collapse. She had never concealed anything from Aunt Maggie before, and she had never regretted telling her anything.

"Well, is it understood that there's nothing real in what I say, that it's all stupid invention and imagination on my part?" she asked.

"Quite understood, darling," said Aunt Maggie.
"How can you ask?"

Violet sat down on the floor and opened her heart.

"I've been inventing things about you," she said.

"Hurrah!" said Aunt Maggie, with great enjoyment.
"What have you been making me do?"

The geniality of this made Violet's heart go utterly out to her.

"I've been making you behave not quite nicely to me," she said. "I've been making you behave as if you were the mistress of the house. You see, dear, I know it's all your kindness, but I'm left with nothing to do. Oh, I feel such a beast for saying this! You manage the stable and the house and the garden, and give all the orders, and everything is always exactly right, and what happens is that when I give an order, as I did this morning to the gardeners about the meadow, they tell me you have ordered the opposite."

Lady Tenby did not laugh now. She was listening very carefully, and when the girl paused a moment, looking at her, she only smiled and nodded.

"Go on, darling," she said.

Violet considered whether she could possibly tell her about those quarterly payments. She settled she could not; it would look as if she grudged her the money.

"There's nothing to go on with," she said. "Are you vexed with me?"

"No, dear; how can you ask? I'm vexed with myself, though. Let me think a moment."

"Oh, please don't be vexed with yourself," said Violet.

"I think I shall have to be."

She paused a moment.

"Violet, do you entirely trust me?" she said. "I don't mean to say that I don't make mistakes; I may,

for instance, have been wrong about those silly garden-beds. But, my dear, do you think I always mean well towards you ?”

“ And how can you ask that ?” said Violet.

“ I take that as a ‘ yes.’ Well, dear, in all that I have done here my one and only idea has been to save you trouble, to let you enjoy yourself. I don’t find ordering dinner or engaging servants or dismissing them interesting—I don’t, indeed. But I see, now you point it out, that I have been stupid. I wanted to save you trouble, while you wanted to learn. I don’t accuse myself of selfishness or anything of that sort, but I certainly accuse myself of stupidity. I am very sorry. Let us start differently to-morrow. Of course, my dear, I will help you in all ways that you wish, but not in others. You darling !”

Lady Tenby suddenly bent and kissed her.

“ It was dear of you to tell me,” she said, “ because I know when one is very fond of a person, as you are of me, it is dreadfully difficult to find fault with her. And you told me so nicely, so gently.”

Her eyes were full of tears, quite genuine ones. But she cried easily.

“ Oh, Aunt Maggie, have I hurt you ?” asked Violet, full of compunction.

“ Yes, dear, a little—at least, you have hurt my conceit in thinking I was doing rather well. And it’s a good thing you have. I’m most grateful. And now will you let me ask you something, just for my own comfort ? You—you don’t repent having asked me to live with you ?”

“ Aunt Maggie, you goose !” said Violet, also rather dim-eyed.

“ That’s all right, then. I know you are telling me the truth. But, my goodness, how gladly I would go away,

if you wished it ! I want you to realize that—to promise me that you will tell me to go whenever you or Ted in the slightest degree feel that I'm in the way. Do you promise ?”

“ Certainly,” said Violet, smiling through her dim eyes.

“ That's good ; that makes me more comfortable. Because there is nothing in the world which I desire so much as your happiness and his. I stick to that ; I will say it on the Day of Judgment. Whatever I may have done that is foolish, or unwise, or wicked——”

“ Wicked !” echoed Violet gently.

From the outer darkness came whimpering and crying. It must be kept quiet. Lady Tenby did not want to be bothered with her soul.

“ Yes, dear,” she said, “ for who knows whether any action we commit, though done with the best intentions, may not be wicked, or whether, when we are afraid we have done something bad, it may not prove to contain the germ of what is noble and happiness-giving ? But, there ! My sole real desire is, and has been, to secure your happiness and Ted's.”

“ I know that,” said Violet. “ And I am happy. I think he is, too, is he not ?”

“ Ted, dear ? A new life.”

From the details of garden-beds and dinner-ordering the talk had deepened, and was concerned with grave things, and it was reserved for Ted, though unconsciously, to pull it up to the surface again. His dressing-room was next door, and on the moment came a long-drawn snore. Both laughed, and Aunt Maggie shouted out at the top of her voice :

“ Ted dear, don't make such a row. We can't hear ourselves speak.”

Then she turned to Violet with an unspoken question.

“ Yes, I've had a little cold this last day or two,”

Violet answered. "He is wise to sleep there. He catches cold so easily."

Lady Tenby looked at her tenderly.

"You darling! If I was your husband, and you had diphtheria and smallpox, I wouldn't sleep in my dressing-room," she said.

Violet laughed.

"No, because I should send you out of the house altogether," she said.

"Which you promise to do, if I become a nuisance," said Aunt Maggie. Gracious me, it's after twelve! I must go to bed. There is a packet of letters I haven't looked at yet."

She kissed Violet long and closely.

"We have had a nice little talk," she said. "We began about little things, and ended in big ones, and found we agreed. What a stupid donkey I have been! Poor, well-meaning old Dow! No, I don't want any more comfort now. Good-night, my darling! Oh, Violet, how I pray for your happiness!"

She went straight to her bedroom, where, as she had said, there was a deposit of unopened letters awaiting her. Among them was a packet from her bankers, containing her pass-book, newly returned. It had not been made up for some time, and she looked through the entries for the last month or two. Then she locked it up in her despatch-box. That mattered so much less than—other things.

CHAPTER XII

THE pass-book which Lady Tenby had locked up in her despatch-box that night in April down at Chevely had three months' later made another journey to the bank, and had been returned to her this morning, coming up with her letters and her early morning tea. The early morning tea was really early, because she and Violet had an hour's ride before breakfast in the park, and in these very busy days of July it was necessary to begin betimes, if one hoped to get through the engagements of the day at all. She just glanced at her letters as she dressed; she just glanced at her pass-book. The glance at the letters was sufficient, since for the next week, after which time they were going to High Beach, there was no possibility of sandwiching in any further engagement. The glance at her pass-book was sufficient also, for the midsummer quarter-day was already more than a fortnight old, and midsummer quarter-day did not contain any refreshing news.

It took her very little time to dress, since the real dressing would occur after her ride; it took her also very little time to settle if there was anything to be done about this annoying affair of the pass-book. Clearly there was nothing. Violet must have revoked the order for quarterly payments, but the revoking of them might easily have occurred two quarters earlier. There was a half-year's income to be thankful for. She was thankful, and only wished her thankfulness might have spread itself farther into the future. But even as it was, she had not

done badly. It must not be supposed that she admitted to herself this savage exposure of her own mind. To herself even it was all covered up, carefully sanded, raked over. The official version of it all was quite different, and was more or less as follows: She had no right at all to any allowance from Violet, as soon as Violet's position as "paying guest" in her house ceased. It had ceased when they went abroad in December. But Violet felt so generously and so delicately about money—the generosity cost her little; the delicacy was natural to her—and she had clearly meant (for these two quarters) that these payments should be continued. Lady Tenby had said she never bothered about her pass-book. Violet knew that, and her natural delicacy took advantage of the fact, and continued to send quarterly cheques. She—Lady Tenby—knew nothing about that, since she never bothered about money at all. She had happened (it was a mere happening) to send her pass-book to the bank last April, and had found those payments were still going on. That was so like Violet; she meant to make her gifts undetected. Undetected they should be. Lady Tenby had determined to say nothing about them, to receive them in the same spirit in which they were given. But now they were withdrawn. It was clear, therefore, (hardly a matter of policy, even) that their withdrawal should be as unnoticed as the practice of them. But it was a great nuisance. She had already invested a comfortable little sum during those last six months, and the comfortable little sum she had hoped to make more comfortable yet. Eventually, of course, it would all come back to Ted and his children, if he had any. Lady Tenby had no real thought of purchasing an annuity with her savings.

Ten minutes later she met Violet in the hall, and was eloquently cheerful.

“ Darling, there are people who make *la pluie et le beau temps*,” she said ; “ and certainly you are the weather-clerk for London. Luckily you give me no *pluie* ; and what a divine morning ! You look fresher than daisies or your own flower-name, and you can’t have been in bed till three.”

“ You, too, Aunt Maggie,” said she.

“ Yes, but when one is a hundred, no one notices if one has eight wrinkles under the eyes or nine. I know I have nine this morning. But you have none. I should see the first ; you wouldn’t see my ninth. Are the horses round ? And is Ted coming ?”

Violet laughed.

“ I am sure he is not,” she said. “ If he sits up late, he likes to get up late. I don’t. If I sit up late, I like to get up early. And do you think my little party went off well ? If it did, it was entirely you.”

“ I suppose, then, from modesty, I ought to say it did not. But as it wasn’t ‘ me ’ at all, I must say it did. Violet dear, I wish you weren’t such a howling success. It seems to make us looser from each other. Darling, I didn’t mean either of those remarks. I am proud—proud that you are such a success, and nothing loosens us.”

Violet smiled at her as her mare broke into a canter on the soft earth of the ride.

“ That’s better,” she said.

Lady Tenby rode rather well, just as she did so many other things rather well, but the horse, which had not sat up till three, was a little fresher than its rider. Consequently, she was quite well occupied till they had put the mile behind them. Physically she was well occupied, mentally she was fairly well occupied, with the exertion of normal spirits in face of this omission in her budget. But before they had got half-way up the mile, she was com-

pletely occupied, physically and mentally. For among those who passed them, going in the opposite direction, was a young man on a small, vicious-looking pony, that evidently wanted to be naughty if it was allowed. Probably it would not be allowed. He looked the sort of boy whom animals instinctively knew, with whom they behaved well, though wishing to behave otherwise. She liked that sort of boy ; she had liked that particular boy. Violet apparently had not seen him, and Lady Tenby was not sure—not absolutely sure that he had recognized either of them. They had passed each other quickly, both cantering fast. But though it was a hot morning, and the exercise of managing her horse was warming, she felt that her face had grown white. Suddenly and instinctively she had felt the grip of fear.

But in a moment she cast it off ; a second's wrestle with it was enough, and as they slowed down at the end of the mile, their horses satisfied and amenable, she was completely able to think again, to plot again. She wanted—desperately—to put off a meeting. A meeting, inevitably almost, must come, either here or certainly at High Beach. But she did not want it now—not now. To-morrow would be better than to-day. Next week would be better than to-morrow. Or was it possible that there should be no meeting ? Why could not they go back to Chevely for August—August and September, if need be ? The east coast was delicious in October, and Ted had his golf-links at Chevely. . . . But only, not now. Perhaps Frank had not seen them.

And then she told herself that she was being frightened at nothing. If there was any one thing less likely than another in this world, it was that Violet should ever tell him that she had heard of his engagement. The very fact that he did not speak of it would insure her silence. And he could not speak of it, because—there was nothing

to speak of. Yet she did not want them to meet—she did not want them to meet.

At the end of the mile Violet drew up.

“How heavenly!” she said; “and how nice and empty it was! That’s the point in riding early. You get your ride, which is what you go out for. You don’t get the tiresome people. I only passed one woman I know: that dreadful woman—what is her name?—who is scraping her way into society by playing the piano for charities, and thinks she ought to be great friends with me, because I was a governess and she was a professional. She sits her horse like a person in a waggonette, quite sideways. What a climber! Am I one, too, Aunt Maggie?”

Violet patted her mare’s sleek neck.

“We all want to be happy, I suppose,” she said, “and we do what we think will make us so. I think it will make me immensely happy to walk our horses slowly back, and then gallop up again. Or will that be too much for you? I don’t really care. I——”

She had turned her mare’s head round. She saw who it was that came towards them.

“That’s not enough,” said Lady Tenby; “let us go round to the north of the Park, over the Serpentine Bridge, and then come up here again.”

But Violet had seen; she no longer attended to these plans.

“Why—why,” she said—“why, it is Mr. Frank! I am so glad to see you. I had no idea you were back. You never told us, you know. Why didn’t you? I am glad to see you.”

He must have recognized them, and turned again after he had passed them. Lady Tenby accepted the inevitable, and, as her sensible way was, appeared to welcome it. Her experience of life had taught her that it was better to welcome the inevitable, even if it was unwelcome,

for a welcome sometimes disarmed its rancour. Besides, how unlikely that anything should come out! It was almost impossible that it should. The optimistic view of contingencies was usually the correct one; only fools encouraged disaster by their own pessimism, preparing the way for it by expecting it. She had no intention of and but little aptitude for being a fool.

Frank was clearly delighted at the warmth and genuineness of Violet's welcome. For a moment he had been undecided whether to turn and ride back after her, but he had been such good friends at High Beach last year with both these Lady Tenbys. He had thought about them both so much—especially one of them—all this year out in Egypt. And when that one came flashing by in all the glory of her youthful beauty, it was impossible not to turn, and see whether the goddess would smile on him again. He was ready with his incense, just as he had been nearly a year ago.

"But what splendid luck," he cried, "that I should meet you both on my first morning in town! I only got back yesterday afternoon. How are you, Lady Tenby? How are you, Miss—Lady Tenby?"

He laughed.

"How confusing it sounds!" he said.

"Not at all," said Aunt Maggie. "When you speak of or to Violet you say Lady Tenby in your ordinary voice; when you speak of or to me, you must say it in a wheezy, cracked voice. That means the old one."

But if it was not surprising that he looked at Violet with the eager, admiring homage which, after all, was her due tribute from a young man, it was not surprising either that she liked it. He was extraordinarily good-looking, also, and tanned berry-brown by the suns of Egypt, lean and smooth of face, broad-shouldered and slim. He had taken off his straw-hat in salute, and still held

it in his hand, and his thick, short, curly hair was glossy in the vigour of its growth. She liked his curls ; she had confessed as much to Aunt Maggie. And they and he were likeable still. But in neither of them was there the faintest shade of embarrassment in this meeting (that was reserved for Aunt Maggie). The two—the beautiful young wife, the pleasant, manly young fellow, who had been good friends last year—had found each other again, and found that they were likely to be good friends again.

Violet laughed at this tonal differentiation of their names given by Aunt Maggie.

“ Oh, do try it, Mr. Frank,” she said. “ I should like to hear you. And now we’ve got you again after this long time, you needn’t think we intend to let you go at once. Do ride back with us to the end, and tell me your plans. When do you go down to High Beach ? Your people are there, I know, already. The imps sent me a joint letter yesterday, saying that they were ready for me. Or do you stop in town for the present ? ”

“ Only a week,” said he. “ Then I shall go to High Beach for a bit. I do hope you intend to be there.”

“ Indeed I do, quite irrespective of the imps’ summons, which is a royal command in itself.”

“ They adore you,” remarked Frank.

“ Then the adoration is mutual. Oh dear, I suppose it’s wrong of me, but I can’t help being rather pleased that they have had three governesses in the course of the year, all of whom were perfectly incompetent to keep them in order. Just now there is an interregnum. I shall take them in hand again when I get there, if your mother will let me.”

“ We had jolly bathes, too,” said Frank, with apparent irrelevance. But the irrelevance did not strike Violet : she was there.

“ Oh, it’s a dear place ! ” said she. “ What tremendous

fun we had last summer ! And it was there, too, you see, that I first met my husband and Aunt Maggie."

" That's Lady Tenby in the wheezy, cracked voice," remarked that lady. " It's me, in fact."

Frank felt as if he ought to say something to her. Just for the moment he had to think ; with Violet there was no need to think. He remembered everything so very clearly.

" How you used to rook us at bridge !" he said, with some vague recollection of playing with her. " We played the last night before I left."

" You left, I remember, in the middle of the night," said Violet.

" I know, and it was raining hard. I don't think I ever felt drearier."

" Your going broke up the weather completely," said Violet. " We had a dismally wet week—do you remember, Aunt Maggie ? And then I went with your people to Harrogate. It was there that I heard about—about the golden uncle—"

" Who walked along the bottom of the sea and caught hold of the mackintosh of a telegram," said Frank quickly. " I did so much want to write to you, but you had been peremptory."

Lady Tenby had one moment of agonized, fruitless thought. She remembered a letter from Frank, asking her to convey congratulations to Violet. It had arrived on the morning that Ted and she were engaged, and she had been reading it when they came in together. She remembered crumpling it up ; what she could not remember was whether she had conveyed the message. That is the worst of what may be called " diplomacy." It is difficult for the diplomatist to remember afterwards what form of diplomacy, truthfulness, or deceit, he has adopted. And already, within ten minutes from this

chance meeting at the head of the mile, the two were on dangerous ground. She broke into their conversation.

"Violet dear, you ought to write down your stories," she said. "They are more complete nonsense than any I have ever heard. That was a lovely one you told the imps at Christmas. The imps came up to town and spent their Christmas with us, Mr. Frank."

"I know. It was good of you. Polly wrote me a worldly letter about it, saying there had been a good deal going on in town. Apparently there had."

They had come back to the end of the ride, and Lady Tenby observed the clock with horror.

"There still is a good deal going on," she said. "Violet dear, it is half-past nine. We must get back. You have fifty engagements before lunch. Do come and see us, Mr. Frank."

"Oh, that's no good," said Violet. "We shall be out unless we are more definite. To-night—let's see, what is to-night? Yes; we're going to the opera. Do you in the least care for the opera, Mr. Frank? Please be truthful."

"Are you going to ask me to go with you?" said he. "I love it."

"Sure? Then do dine with us at seven, and come with us. It is something rather good—'Madama Butterfly,' I think. That is delightful. I am so glad to meet you again."

Danger, danger! The red flag waved in Lady Tenby's face. There was no use in her telling herself that there was no danger; that optimism was of the lips only. It was in vain that she told herself that Frank could not speak of his engagement to Violet, and that it was equally impossible that she should speak of it to him. It was in vain that she asked herself what she feared, for,

somehow, it was not that alone that made her quake. There was danger in the fact of Frank being here, in the fact that he and Violet had stepped back in one moment into the friendly relations that had existed last summer. Anyone could see how glad she was to welcome him back, and it required no more acuteness to interpret the eagerness and admiration that shone in his eyes. And yet, what cause had she to fear ? Violet was devoted to Ted—it seemed a grossness even to think of those things—Frank to her was a young man engaged to be married. Here, indeed, to one of Violet's dazzling and unconscious purity of soul, were two safeguards of impregnable validity. And yet she was afraid—afraid with spiritual terror and with physical sickness.

She had prayed about it, too. How she had prayed, not only selfishly that what she had done might not be found out, but that no consequences from it might be visited on the two most dear to her in all the world ! She longed for their happiness, and had tried to secure it by a lie. That lie, at the cost of humiliation and loss to herself, she had more than once had the impulse as well as the opportunity to confess, but the impulse had not been strong enough. Indeed, she was like a woman suffering from toothache, who prays, agonizedly, that the pain may cease, but will not go to have the cause of it removed. She wanted to keep the tooth, and asked God to cure the pain. And this fear came upon her in a spasm, as if it had been a physical seizure taking possession of her. It was no longer a thing external to herself ; it was part of her, even as were her flesh and bones, and it made her faint and sick. She knew that nothing she could do would help her, for now she was incapable even of the impulse to tell Violet of the great lie. It was all-important, indeed, now that she was married to Ted, that for her sake, no less than for

Lady Tenby's, she should never know it. For that was one of the safeguards, that she should think that Frank was engaged. It would keep her off dangerous ground ; it would make it impossible, to one of Violet's truth and honour, even to look that way at all. And not less cogent was the fact that she herself was married. . . . Perhaps, after all, so thought Lady Tenby, as the sudden inexplicable violence of her panic began to subside a little, perhaps she had been frightening herself gratuitously. Violet had told her before that she had never been in love with Frank. She had accepted that then, and it was infinitely less likely that Violet should get to think of him with lover-light now.

But it was too late to undo, or try to undo, the past, and even while the sickness of her fright was on her, while she told herself that she would do anything to revoke that, it was something of a relief to her to feel so sure that she could not be called upon to make that self-exposure. It was as if now she had been to the dentist, and he had said it was absolutely impossible to take that aching tooth out. And all her moral cowardice rejoiced. They had to make a plan, the dentist and she, as to what was the next best thing to do, since extraction was clearly impossible. For—she had to convince herself of this, and *so went over it again—it was impossible now to tell Violet that the story of Frank's engagement was a pure fabrication. That would so surely be acting for the worst, for it would be removing one of the safeguards. Yet she did not soberly imagine that Violet was in need of them. The idea came from her terrified imagination.

So she and the dentist had to put their heads together and see what was the next best thing to be done. In other words, once more she knelt down and prayed that no evil consequence might arise from her fault—her own great fault. It was easier, now that all possibility of the tooth

being removed was past, to pray with full sincerity. So deep was her habit of insincerity that even this spasm of fear did not penetrate it. Insincerity reached to the very bottom of her soul ; probe ever so deeply, it would still be there, bog-like and treacherous.

In nothing could that be more convincingly shown than in the effect on herself of her own agonized entreaties. For, when she rose, she felt comforted, felt braver, felt more able to seek after some plan that might neutralize the possible consequences of her deed, that might prevent the account being rendered her. She did not care what that plan might involve ; she was willing in herself to plunge headlong into any depth of meanness or falsehood that might avert the consequences of what she had already done. It seemed to her possible that it was through some further degradation of her own soul that remedy for others might be found. She was willing to take all that upon herself, to mend one mortal sin by another. And, God help her, she thought that this fortitude was an answer, immediate and reassuring, to her prayers.

She rose comforted, as if by any misery of hers she could avert possible consequences of her act. For if the sinner alone suffered for his sin, where would be the sin ? His soul is his own ; he may torture it if he chooses. But the man with a soul is not truly tortured till his sin has passed out of his own hands. It is when it begins to touch the lives of others that real pain begins. Lady Tenby had suffered, and she was suffering now. She bore that gladly, provided only that the suffering would be confined to her. But she thought that she would be able to expiate what she had done alone. And since now she felt braver, more confident, she believed that the worst was over. The sickening terror might come to her again and yet again, but she thought she understood now. She was

being punished, and rightly, that others might not suffer. . . . And what a relief it was to know that no confession of hers could now do any good ! It could not but be harmful. Probably that, too, was an answer to her prayers. She was not going to be punished as ruthlessly as that. She saw the justice of justice ; she knew that mercy must be mingled with it. But in her heart there would be no mercy for Frank, if, by some chance, consequences were not going to be confined to her own suffering. Even in this moment of what she thought of as enlightenment, as answer to prayer, she made no image of him in the sickness of love and longing. Should he fall in love with Violet—that contingency she still thought of as most remote—he must bear the pains alone, knowing that he had no business to fall in love with her. The scheme of mercy for herself contained no scheme of mercy for him.

As she dressed, she recovered herself amazingly. She was quite glad that she had been so miserably terrified : she was more than glad that she had taken her terror to the source of all peace. But in all probability she had vastly exaggerated the dangers. What, after all, was the origin of her perilous sense ? Merely that Frank Winthrop had come back from Egypt, which she always knew he would do, and that he and Violet had been glad to see each other, which must necessarily have been the case. As for their falling in love with each other—to take the least unlikely of the impossibilities—what then ? Such things happened, and no one was much the worse. He had had his chance last year, if he was in love with her, and had not taken it. Afterwards Violet and Ted had a similar chance. They had taken it—with assistance.

She got down to breakfast not very long after Violet. Ted was already there, with the paper propped in front

of him, as usual, for breakfast was, least of all, his conversational time. Violet was half-way through a pile of letters, and it appeared probable that nothing had been said about this morning's meeting.

"Ted, you dear, lazy old pig!" said his mother; "why didn't you come out and ride? We met an old friend. I am not sure that you ought not to be jealous."

This was not a complete success.

"Oh, Frank Winthrop!" said he. "Violet told me."

"The Old Dow is late, as usual," said she. "But I am late because I've been thinking about him. Really too attractive. He ought not to be allowed about loose. Damage to elderly hearts, if not to young ones."

Ted resented being made to talk at breakfast. But he was capable of this elementary sort of badinage.

"Does he know?" he asked. "Did you tell him?"

"No; but I shall this evening. Violet has asked him to dine and come to the opera. I shall be there. Are you coming, dear?"

"Probably not. One gooseberry is sufficient. Violet will be gooseberry."

"Darling Aunt Maggie," said Violet, rather absent-mindedly, and still reading letters, "do be serious a minute. Isn't it awful? I did say that either you or I would dine with the Debenhams this evening, and I had quite forgotten. I thought we were both free when I asked Mr. Frank. Will you be kind and go?"

Ted looked up from his paper.

"But she won't," he said to his wife. "She's got Winthrop now without any gooseberry at all. Bad sort of fruit, gooseberries."

"Oh, shut up, Ted!" said his mother. "Read your paper. Violet darling, what shall we do?"

"That means," said Violet, "that you insist on going to the opera."

"But I don't," she said. "I was just wondering what was best. The only thing is that Mary Debenham is a friend of yours, and I hardly know her. On the other hand, I know Mr. Frank so very well."

There was no mistaking the meaning of this. It was quite clear to Violet that Aunt Maggie had in her mind the letter Frank had written her about his engagement. And she was right, though it was not there in exactly the sense Violet imagined. But clearly Frank (since he had once confided in Aunt Maggie) might welcome an opportunity of private conversation with her again. So she acquiesced, though reluctantly, in the proposed arrangement.

"How tiresomely sensible you are, Aunt Maggie!" she said. "Mind you tell him how dreadfully sorry I am, and suggest his riding with us again to-morrow. If I can get away from my dinner in decent time, I shall come in for the last act."

Lady Tenby was always certain—at least, when things happened in the way she wished, especially in details—that Providence was giving her His best attention, and this fortunate circumstance of Violet's previous engagement was quite a touching little token of regard. It had come so quickly, too, after her terrible fright this morning and her agonized supplications, that it would be impious almost to consider it a coincidence. Already she began to detect in her spasm of terror a culpable want of faith ; she had not a fine enough reliance on the power of prayer. But it was not sufficient merely to pray : she must be on the lookout for any opportunity that might come in her way of averting possible danger or suffering from those she loved. For she knew very well, in spite of Violet's assertion, which she accepted as official, that there had been strong mutual attraction between the two.

Violet had begun to fall in love with him. It was but a little flame, and she herself had easily blown it out. But were there living sparks yet among its ashes and grey embers ? She had no reason to suppose it, except for a small doubt in her mind that was hard to stifle, as to the terrible—or so it would be in this instance—the terrible vitality that exists in all that pertains to love.

There was, unfortunately, no doubt whatever that Frank was disappointed when he became aware that Violet was not to be of the party, and his “ Oh, what a bore !” slipped out with the sincerest spontaneity. Lady Tenby gave a great crack of laughter at it.

“ Dear Mr. Frank !” she cried. “ You say that when there is the certain prospect of spending the whole evening with a fascinating young thing of ninety-five like me ! I’m sure your grandfather, if you have one alive, would delight in the idea. And what’s good enough for your grandfather ought to be good enough for you.”

Frank shook hands. He looked so wonderfully young and eager and smart. Lady Tenby liked young men to be like that, greatly on the alert, pouncing on pleasures. She did not really in the least care whether their pleasures were edifying or not ; she only wanted them to be pleased. And for one moment she contrasted him in her mind with Ted—to Ted’s disadvantage.

“ Yes, what’s good enough for my grandfather,” he said “ (though why ‘ grandfather,’ Lady Tenby ?), is quite good enough for me. But one can’t have too much of a good thing, if the good thing is Lady Tenbys.”

She liked the slight touch of impertinence in this : yet it was hardly impertinence : it was only the boyish expression of his friendliness to them both.

"Too many of a good thing, you mean," she said. "You haven't wriggled out of your first *cri du cœur* yet."

"Perhaps, then, I mean many," he answered ; "but I certainly also mean much, as I said."

She laughed again.

"Certainly you will have much," she said. "You can guess what faces you : solitary dinner with me, solitary drive to the opera with me, three (or is it four ?) solid solitary acts with me in the box, and if you are not going anywhere particularly out of the way afterwards, a solitary drive again, and I will drop you."

Frank, as was natural to, and uncalculated in, a young man of pleasant mind, of great good looks and of high spirits, was an extremely agreeable companion. Whether he was clever or not was of very second-rate importance, for cleverness is a quality which has no social existence at all, unless it is made soluble in charm. And if charm is there, it matters very little what happens to be dissolved in it. He was young, he was alert, he was full to the brim of enjoyment, and in the responsive enjoyment of these qualities Lady Tenby quite ceased for the time to worry herself about things that had only this morning frightened and chilled her. His natural gaiety was infectious ; she ceased to suffer from other ailments of fear and misgiving. No doubt, in part, her enjoyment was due to reaction, for it is mercifully ordained that reaction follows on disquiet and trouble, as surely as it follows on joy. She was tired of fears ; that part of her mind that was perceptive of alarms was dulled, and this, too, she put down to an answering of her petitions, thinking that because she felt her fears less they were in themselves less. Frank was no less charming and friendly with her than he had been with Violet ; she was not less responsive to his charm.

And then into her poor, warped, crooked soul there entered an idea that seemed feasible, that seemed almost brilliant. It was not even a straw that she grasped at : it was an empty bubble, but it seemed to her possibly substantial. Pathetic in the utter futility of her idea, doubly pathetic in her being able to persuade herself that it was not futile, she believed that her grasping at this bubble raised her head above the deep waters which must assuredly drown her. She had let loose on the world that frantic lie—her own lie—and what must result from it rendered her frantic and unconscious of her frenzy. She was self-poisoned, and all her energies were now in the service of the poison. And she thought that she was exerting herself to undo the deadly harm she had already done. For she was going to call herself ninety-five no longer.

The curtain had just gone down on the first act, and she cast a rapid glance at the stalls.

“ There are more tiresome people here to-night than I have ever seen gathered together in one place before,” she said. “ I shall sit behind the curtain, and nobody will come and talk. That is the worst of a box. Everyone looks upon it as a sort of public-house—without drinks—where they may come and yawn and chatter. Sit there, Mr. Frank, behind me, else people will certainly come up to talk to you.”

“ But don’t you want to see your friends ?” he asked, with a candour that she found too modest.

“ Of course I don’t. Do you think I came to the opera with you in order to see other people ? I think one sees too much of other people. That is the worst of London. It is so largely ‘other people,’ instead of ‘the people.’ Darling Violet and Ted are so sensible. They often dine quite alone and play Patience after dinner, and send me out to represent them. I should not wonder if when I

got home to-night I found that Violet had sent some excuse to her hostess, and had dined with Ted alone."

Frank did not reply for a moment. He had seated himself at the back of the box, where Lady Tenby had indicated, and she did not look round at him. But he spoke very soon.

"I'm awfully glad," he said—"I mean I'm awfully glad they are so devoted to each other. She's one of the people one must want to be happy. Isn't she?"

The reply had got an awkward turn in it. That was not quite the correct aspect.

"I want everybody to be happy," said Lady Tenby broadly. "And—and, do you know, I don't much care how they arrive at it. Dear Violet has arrived at it in the most delightful way, by marrying the man she adores."

She was speaking (and knew it) rather wildly. But she had made a point which she wished to make. And Frank, again, had no immediate reply. So she proceeded, this time not wildly.

"It is so delightful to know that you, all of you, are going to be at High Beach," she said. "Violet and Ted, I suppose, will be always together, playing golf and bathing, and you, Mr. Frank, must really come sometimes and take me for a walk along the cliffs. How funny it all is! When I was living with Ted alone there, I was never lonely. Now that Violet has joined us, I feel a little out of it sometimes."

She could not help wondering if she was looking young. She knew she felt young. All the eager sympathy of youth for youth was hers; she easily imagined herself to be in the long-lost twenties. There was a little rouge; probably only a sophisticated eye could detect it. But she felt young—that was the main point.

"I think that is perfectly brutal of them," said Frank.

"But I don't quite believe it, you know. I don't expect you really ever feel out of it—do you ?"

"Yes, a little sometimes, my dear," she said gently. Then she gave her great laugh.

"Really, Mr. Frank, I beg your pardon," she said, "for calling you 'my dear.' But you are so jolly and friendly, you know. I suppose you can't help it."

"I don't in the least want to," said he.

"That is nice of you. Oh, there's the curtain going up already, and I know you men always want a cigarette between all the acts. Never mind ; you shall bolt at the end of this act, and have two. I wish I could join you, but at present there is no ladies' smoking-room here. When we are kings and queens let us make one."

Lady Tenby did not attend to a single note or moment of the next act, for her new plan was already in operation. She had more than insinuated Violet's devotion to Ted ; she had not less than insinuated a certain loneliness that resulted to her from that. Many young men had attachments to rather elderly women, for all boys were more or less defenceless against women. Here was a possible solution, and she felt herself religiously bound to do her best to avert the consequences she feared, however remote and improbable. She nearly cozened herself into the belief that this process was distasteful to her. That she could not quite accomplish, for the young strong face, the wiry-curled head, was near her. She could not quite convince her credulous soul, which had so long been accustomed to believe all she told it, that she disliked what she was going to attempt. She did not exactly want Frank to fall in love with her—at least, she told herself she did not—but she wanted to get intimate with him ; she wanted to stand between him and Violet, in case there might be danger of those dark young eyes looking too

closely at those blue young eyes. They might discover there, shining ever so deep down in them, the faint light of what might have been a beacon of flame, and sounding in them an echo of the music that had never been heard.

Frank responded eagerly to her friendliness, and the two cigarettes she had foreseen for him at the end of the second act were entirely forgotten. He had remembered her from last year as a jolly sympathetic soul, a good fellow to whom one could talk as to a man, and now he began to find there was something behind this comradeship, something womanly and tender. She looked so young, too, it seemed impossible that she had a son older than himself. . . . Then came the fumble of the box-opener's key in the door, and it was thrown open.

Violet entered, coming straight from her dinner-party, as she had said she would try to do. Aunt Maggie had not happened to mention this possibility—indeed, she had hinted at the likelihood of her having thrown her party over, in order to dine quietly with Ted. It was therefore not surprising that Frank stared at her for a moment—expecting her so little—in amazement. It was not surprising for other reasons, either.

Never before had the splendour of her beauty struck him. A year ago Miss Allenby, in her neat serge dress or the simple tea-gown in which she appeared on those occasions when she dined downstairs, had seemed to him pretty to the point of making him say so ; but to-night she was superbly beautiful. She had thrown back her long white silk opera-cloak before she entered, and he saw her for the first time magnificently dressed. He knew nothing about dress, and in this artificial light could not see whether she was in pink or topaz-yellow ; but her gown gleamed like some liquid aquamarine, a setting of jewels for the jewel it clad. High in the bright coils of her hair she wore one splendid diamond star, and one

great diamond winked and flashed in the curve between her breasts. Otherwise her neck, right down to the edge of her low-cut gown, was bare.

Frank had sprung to his feet.

“Why, how splendid!” he said. “Shan’t I put your cloak down for you?”

And he took it from her with hands that trembled a little.

CHAPTER XIII

TED was strolling back from the club-house of the golf-links at High Beach with a mashie in his hand, with which he occasionally took a shot or two on to a green as he came near it. He had been playing very good golf during this week or so that they had already been down here, and this afternoon had played the round of his life. But, oddly enough, that delightful occurrence failed to give him the satisfaction which he had every right to expect from it. His serene and quiet soul was a little troubled, and the worst of it was that he could not get at the cause of it. He was troubled about Violet, and he did not exactly know why. For the last two or three days she had been restless, and looked fatigued, and yet she assured him that she was in excellent health, and that nothing ailed her. He had tried to question her more than once about it, but it would be difficult to do so again, for the last time he had asked her about herself she had answered him with a certain finality.

"Ted dear, I am perfectly well," she had said. "The moment I have the slightest indication of not being, I will tell you. But till then, please don't worry either yourself or me."

But decidedly he was not quite at his ease about her, for usually she was so little liable to "moods," and the "moods," when they came, took the form of an added and keener delight in life. But now she appeared to him to have left her normal level altogether, and to be one

mass of moods. On one day she would spend the hours in almost complete inactivity, the next she would seem to be afraid to be unoccupied for five minutes together. Such a day had occurred yesterday. She had practised at the piano before breakfast, had rushed him off, "while the meat was yet in his mouth," to play golf the moment afterwards, and immediately on her return had posted down to the beach to bathe with the imps. She had brought them back to lunch, and had set off on a motor-drive with them directly after, arranging to be back to an early tea, so that she might have another round of golf with him before dinner. The Winthrops had dined with them, and Violet had simply refused to stop playing bridge till midnight. And when they had gone, she wrote half a dozen letters before going to bed.

To-day she had been at the opposite pole, and yet Ted could not quite believe that it was the exertions of yesterday that had fatigued her, though he tried to comfort himself with so sensible an explanation. For she had been quite as restless—only she had done nothing. She had sat down to the piano after breakfast, had played for five minutes only, and stopped in the middle of a bar. Then she had ordered the motor, had gone out for half an hour, and returned to sit in the garden till lunch-time. She had been engaged to play golf with Frank in the afternoon, but had pleaded the great heat as an excuse, though it was certainly no hotter than yesterday, and her husband found himself wondering, with a vague anxiety that made him put his golf-ball in his pocket and walk steadily and quickly across the short velvety grass of the downs, how he should find her when he got back. His mother had been away the last day or two, but returned this evening. Ted was glad of that. It was possible that Violet might like to talk to her about something that she

could say to a woman, though not to him, even. And then, for the first time, a possible explanation occurred to him. His heart quickened at the thought.

Violet had encouraged him to be out all day. She had wanted to be alone, and face, not that, alas ! which Ted had hoped, but something very different. The discovery had appalled her, had unbalanced and unsettled her altogether. She had tried to persuade herself that it was not so, had struggled gallantly, denying and dismissing it, but that was no longer any use. She was in love with Frank.

She had not allowed herself to drift into it, wading out and wading out, so to speak, telling herself that she was well in her depth, and going a step or two farther. The knowledge had come to her with the speed and strength of a mountain flood, taking her off her feet before she really knew that she was in danger. The terms of their comradeship last year had been delightful to her, and it was that comradeship which had been renewed, as though no interruption had come to it, on his return a few weeks ago. Nor had he in any way tried to make love to her. Had he done that, she would have been on her guard. But owing to his behaviour to her—that of a charming boy to a friend—she had had no warning ; also, his affections were already engaged. He was bound in honour to someone else, and she knew she need have no fear about his scrupulousness with regard to that. Often, in those days before this knowledge had come upon her, she had wished that he would tell her about this other girl, as he had told Lady Tenby ; but she could not, of course, even hint, however remotely, at her knowledge of his circumstances. Liking him so much, and caring for his welfare and happiness, she would so gratefully have valued his confidence ; but since he withheld it, she must do without

it. Sometimes she wondered a little why he did not give it her, for he talked so very freely and intimately to her, but no doubt there was some reason. Perhaps he had been already blamed by this unknown girl for telling anybody.

So the days in London, where she saw him constantly, passed in perfect safety, as far as she knew, and so, too, here, where she met him much more constantly, the days passed in like manner. And then, in a moment, when she was not even with him, she knew that she was in love with him. It happened with the suddenness of sunrise. One moment the sun was not there, the next it shot its beams across the grey rock-crystal of the sea, flushing it with colour. That shooting up of the sun over the sea, and the glory of the beams, explained, too, the soft rose-colour with which long ago the sky had been flooded. She had not known what it was then ; she had thought it was only the light of a very warm, a very sincere, friendship. Now she knew that it was the colour that inevitably heralds the day.

So, in this day of loneliness which she had planned, when Lady Tenby was away, and Ted was out, she faced the situation, looked at it without flinching, and, in a manner, got used to it. At any rate, before the sun approached the sea again in the west, she could bring her will to work on it, instead of being, as she had been for the last three or four days, the sport and plaything of her moods. It was no good occupying herself one day, and being inactive the next. That did not make the intolerable more tolerable. It was no use just getting through the minutes and hours with distractions or idleness, only to pass them. There must be something more radical than that. Above all, it was no use her stopping here with Frank next door, longing every moment to see him, and yet avoiding him, or, when they met, wrapping herself up in a cloak of isolation, as she had been doing,

so that they seemed not even to be friends any longer, but the chilliest of acquaintances. She had tried so hard to do that. She had avoided him when she could, and, when avoidance was impossible, she had been the acquaintance merely. That was the worst of all. She could not bear it. When they met next, she would have to put off that. She could see how it hurt him, and she could bear her own worries, but could not bear to make worries for him. In self-defence she had shut herself off from him, made that intangible but impregnable barricade of manner between them. If they met again, she must remedy that. But, if her plan was carried into effect, they would not meet much more. Her heart sobbed, but her will was firm now.

Frank liked her—she felt sure of that—and he could not see why she chilled him. If he only knew . . . and she thanked God he did not. What a good thing that he was engaged to someone ! She thanked God that that entirely prevented her betrayal of herself. Heartache ? There was probably plenty of heartache in the world. Why should she be immune ? It was not a mortal complaint. People got over it, or, if they did not get over it, they bore it.

She knew now. Once, wondering if she knew, she had told Aunt Maggie of the attraction of brown arms and curly head. She saw now how futile that was. She did not care for that ; she cared for him to whom these things happened to belong. Because they were his, she loved them, but she did not love him because of them. And she was Ted's wife.

Even if she had been unmarried, things would not have been different. Frank was pledged as surely as she was pledged, and the carrying out of the pledge, the actual marriage-ring, was but a detail compared to the inevitable pledge. But if only he loved her, she felt that she

would be content never to see him any more. If they could only meet for a moment, see their mutual love in each other's eyes, and part because honour made them part, without a kiss, without a handshake, even ! There would have been something sublime then, something big that would enable her to acquiesce. She would not have this heart-break if he had it also. It was because her heart broke alone that it broke at all.

Several times during the day she had considered whether she would tell Aunt Maggie about it. Aunt Maggie had never failed her before, and perhaps there was some way of regarding it, known to that wise, kind heart, which would make her better able to accept what had come upon her. It did not seem to be her fault : the thing had come from outside. It was no more her fault than if she had been wounded by a fragment of a shooting star. It had come from without, from the unplumbed heights of the heavens. Was there any spiritual surgery that could heal the wound ? But as often as she thought of telling Aunt Maggie, she rejected the idea. This was her own inward and royal trouble. She could only lose it by losing her individuality. All else that had happened to her in life she knew to be a dim half-lit experience compared to this—all, that is to say, except the one necessity that honour imposed. Aunt Maggie could not cure her of being herself. Often she had given her counsels of wisdom and kindness, but she could not give her the recipe that should make her another woman. Another thing, also, made her reject the idea of seeking counsel from her. Aunt Maggie had believed that she was in love with Ted when she became his wife, whereas she was only very fond of him. How odd that she should not have seen the huge difference ! There was all the difference in the world—literally that—between them. They bore no relation to each other. Perhaps she herself

was strangely made, made differently to other women, for it seemed that she made Ted quite happy. She was glad of that, deeply and gratefully glad of it. Only . . . before now she had been able to give him all that she was conscious of in her nature. Now that this new thing had been added to it, would he feel that she was keeping something back ?

It was no use adding to her perplexities. If further difficulties came, they must be dealt with when they came. There was no good in anticipating them, and disheartening herself by failing to see how she would be able to meet them. What she had made up her mind to was that as soon as she reasonably could, without causing uneasiness and anxiety to him or Aunt Maggie, she must leave High Beach. And until then she must behave herself as a reasonable, responsible person. The fact that she had set a time-limit to her stay here, the fact that before long this daily exquisiteness and struggle of meeting Frank would be over, made it so much easier. There were plenty of possible plans. She might quite naturally pay some visits. Even more naturally (and it was this she decided on) she could go to Chevely, and spend August and September there. She knew that Ted was a little worried about her (not very much, poor fellow !), and had several times asked her about her health. It was the simplest thing to confess that she was not quite well, and so suggest that they should go to Chevely, which suited her so excellently. And till then she would behave quietly and normally again. She would behave naturally to everybody, to him, to the imps . . . to Frank. Almost the worst part of the heartache had been the trouble and wonder in his eyes when, as for the last day or two, she had put up this barrier of cold acquaintanceship between him and her. She knew it hurt him, and he could not guess why she did it. It was a foolish

manceuvre, too, on her part. It made nothing any better, it healed nothing.

So it was settled, for she anticipated no difficulty from Ted. The dear old boy always wanted her to have everything that would make her happier, and she only wondered whether Aunt Maggie would be given food for thought, so to speak, when their changed plans were presented to her. Of late Violet had become gradually conscious that Lady Tenby thought more than she had hitherto given her credit for. At first it seemed as if the whole course of her life was dictated by swift spontaneous impulses, founded on brilliant guesses, quick intuitions. In this case, however, no amount of thought could help her to the truth. Nobody, so Violet reasoned, could possibly guess. But it would be better for herself and Ted to talk things over before Aunt Maggie returned, and so present the plan to her as a joint production.

And here was Ted, coming across the lawn preceded by his own long shadow, that reached far in the low sunlight. He looked very typical of himself, somehow—broad, and quiet, and serene—as quiet as the evening, as serene as the sky. She summoned the distillation of all she had thought over in these long, solitary hours, and went to meet him.

“ Well, dear,” she said, “ have you had a nice day ? Did you play well ? ”

“ Can’t help admitting I did,” said he, smiling at her.

“ That’s good. And if you’re not tired, will you come for a stroll along the cliffs with me ? Aunt Maggie won’t be back for another hour.”

“ Why, of course. And what have you done ? Had a bathe ? Had anyone to lunch ? ”

“ No ; I’ve been hermit-crab. I tucked myself right away in my shell, and . . . and thought.”

They had passed through the gate at the bottom of the

lawn, and on to the narrow path at the extreme edge of the sandy cliff. A very heavy storm, coming at spring-tide a month or two ago, had eaten away the base of it, and it was sharp and perpendicular right down to the beach. A bunch of poppies just coming into flower grew a foot or so from the edge, vividly red against the blue background of the sea.

Violet pointed at them.

"Oh, Ted, how lovely ! But don't go near the edge, dear. It goes down so sheerly. Another storm would certainly bring that piece down. I hope the poppies will get their flowering done first, poor dears."

"Rum things you think of, Vi," said he. " Been thinking all day too ?"

"Yes ; and I've brought you out for a stroll to tell you about it."

Ted gave a quiet little grunt, which signified attention. But his heart beat a little quicker : there was the unspoken hope there.

"Ted dear," she said ; "this place, somehow or other, isn't suiting me very well this year. And I wonder, would it bore you very much to let us go back to Chevely ? We can give some little parties ; it might be great fun. Then perhaps we might come back here later, when I'm all right again."

"But of course you shall go where and when you like," said he. "But, my dear, I insist on your seeing a doctor. You told me you were perfectly well."

She laughed.

"I know I did. I didn't want to be bothered. I'm afraid I was dreadfully cross to you, too. Do take Aunt Maggie's view, and remember that crossness is only stomach. She insists it is not a moral quality at all."

"But I wish I could take that view," said he. "I

don't care a bit for your moral qualities. They will do nicely. But I do care about your other thing."

She laughed again. .

" Then you are a rank materialist," she said. " But it's nice of you to fall in with my plan. Are you sure you don't mind ?"

" Not a bit. I shall like it. When shall we go ? Early next week ? I was going to Brancaster to-morrow. There's a club-match, and they've asked me to play."

" Oh, Ted, how lovely !" said she. " You've never played for the club before, have you ?"

" No ; but, of course, we'll go to-morrow if you like."

" You dear. Of course we won't. Do you think Aunt Maggie will like going ? She has her garden there, hasn't she ?"

" She'll like it, I know," said he. " Indeed, I remember her saying on one of our last days in town that she wished you would go to Chevely instead of here."

" Ah, why didn't you tell me ?" asked Violet, with a sudden ring of regret in her voice. " Or why didn't she ?"

" I promised her not to, for fear of your doing what she wanted, and what you didn't want. She didn't tell you for the same reason. You see, then you were looking forward tremendously to coming here : you didn't know it wasn't going to suit you."

The sun had set cloudlessly, and the pale saffron of the evening sky was spread in the west. To Violet, looking out to sea for a moment as they turned, it seemed immeasurably calm but immeasurably distant. A whole ocean of infinite regrets and fears and longings lay between it and her, and that calm was so far off. The sea was unquiet to-night : there must have been a storm somewhere far out, for though they had had a week of windless

weather, a big swell churned in, rattling hoarsely among the streaks of shingle. The child-population had already been reluctantly towed home by inexorable nurses, and the beach was empty but for one solitary figure that walked quickly along the edge of the surf. Just when he was opposite to them he looked up and saw them on the top of the cliff, waved his hand in salutation, for he had no hat to take off, and passed on. Violet had already recognized him.

"Frank, isn't it?" asked Ted. "I like Frank. Fellow of taste, too. He adores you. He'll be awfully sorry to know you are going."

He could not have spoken with greater simplicity or have stated, so he thought, a more commonplace fact. Yet for a moment Violet felt as if her heart was drained of blood. It was but a detail, the sort of detail that she would be liable to encounter any moment of any day. She had to deal with it naturally, answer him lightly. But it struck her as a supreme irony that Ted should say that, and her simplest answer was on the same level.

"I adore him," she said. "He is perfectly charming. He was so nice to me when I was governess there last year. But they all were. I must have a long day with the imps before I go. I think they will rather mind my going, the ducks."

It was not so difficult after all: she found she had only to speak the truth.

"You might ask Frank to come and stay at Chevely," continued Ted.

That was not so easy to reply to. But her answer was light enough.

"That would be nice," she said.

Frank, when they saw him from the cliffs above, was returning from a long, savage, solitary walk. He had

set out soon after breakfast, with the intention of spending the whole day walking, in order to get tired. That seemed the simplest way of quieting himself, since he had no leaning towards the swifter process of alcohol. Also, exactly like Violet, he wanted to reason everything out, to arrive at what was best to be done. These weeks at High Beach, to which he had so much looked forward, because Violet was going to be there, had become sinister and menacing. Inflammable and susceptible he had always been, easily attracted, swift with the incense of shallow homage, playing at love, as children play, or confusing it with the mere attraction of sex and good looks. But now the fierce wild bird had flown to his heart, making a nest that bled. For she could never come to it : her nest was not there, and his heart bled for that. He, like Violet, felt the situation was impossible (not knowing that she felt anything of the sort, not guessing it), and, like her, he had come to the conclusion that he must leave High Beach.

If it had only been that he was in love with her, while she was friendly and cordial with him, he told himself, he would not have come to this determination, but for the last few days she had seemed positively to avoid him, and when of necessity or pure accident they met, she was cold and withdrawn. She seemed to have got tired of him, to have taken a dislike to him even, and search as he would he could not conjecture where his fault had been. The reward and rapture of seeing her, of knowing she liked him, was consolation for the emptiness of his own longing, but that now was taken from him. Hungry though his passion was, it would have been, if not content with that, willing and humble to take it, but without that things were unbearable. Besides, if, as it appeared, she wished, for inscrutable reasons, to avoid him, he would much sooner go for her sake, no less

than for his own. Perhaps she guessed his love, and that might account for it. And yet he believed he had never betrayed himself to her. He wondered, however, if his father had any inkling of it. He had had from time to time that sense that he was being watched. Nor did he exactly wonder at it, for he knew that he had not been behaving like himself.

“Oh, the little more, and how much it is.”

Frank was vaguely aware that there was, or had been, a poet called Browning, but his acquaintance with him went no farther than that. But the lines exactly expressed his thought. She should not have come into the box that night at the opera, for that was when there came to him the look that made “the little more.” All the past year, from July to this July, there had not been a day in which she had been absent from his thoughts. All the year he had secretly thought of her, burning his incense as he had burned it on so many altars. Then came the one moment when she stepped out of the shadow into the blaze of the opera-house, when she stepped out from the innumerable goddesses of the world, and became the woman. There was no more need of the incense-pot ; anybody was goddess enough to burn incense before. It was he who burned now. To get from her the friendliness and comradeship which she had given him was enough for him, since there could not be more. But now that seemed withheld. He felt sure he was not mistaken in that.

Mrs. Winthrop this year was unusually full of preventive and promoting businesses, and would probably have not noticed an earthquake, or the total disappearance of the imps. It was not, therefore, to be expected that she should have observed there was anything amiss with Frank. Had she done so she would have recommended

him a corrective dose of some kind, in accordance with what the symptoms indicated, and plunged back into her sea of savage benevolence. But Frank's father, in the long intervals that elapsed between the few things that he actually did, in the hours between uprising and going to bed, observed a good deal in a quiet, unobtrusive manner, and, as a matter of fact, had practically come to a conclusion as to what ailed his son. His conclusions, whenever he came to them, which was not very often, were usually sound, for he arrived at them by no flash of brilliant, possibly erroneous, intuition, but by quiet elimination of all conclusions that were not sound. This left him with a certain residue that might be considered as solidly come by. This year, in proportion as his wife's activity had increased, his own had waned, and he spent most of the day now sitting on a bench at the end of the garden overlooking the sea. Here he sat, plump and pleasant and contented, with the paper of the day, which he occasionally read, and some volume of extremely light literature, which he never read. It served, however, as a preventive of conversation if his wife or the imps appeared, and he did not want to talk to them. Then he opened it, and, if necessary, answered, while keeping his finger in what was supposed to be the point he had arrived at in his reading, with an absent air. Not even Polly could talk long under these discouraging conditions, and when she withdrew, he shut his book again.

Long hours here had led to a conclusion. Frank, it was quite certain, had something on his mind : if he let himself go he lapsed into a sort of restless silence or monosyllabic irritability, while if he made efforts to mend these lapses, he was lacking in the art of concealing his efforts. Now, there were three main sources of worry (given your family and friends were reasonably prosperous) in this mortal life, and these were love, health, and money.

Health he dismissed at once : to look at Frank was enough. About money he inquired of the boy, asking casually if he found his allowance really sufficient, which he did. There remained the third troublesome ailment. Again he eliminated. Frank had come down here in the highest spirits, looking forward with more than his usual ardour to his stay. Therefore his heart was probably not elsewhere. It was here somewhere. And then Mr. Winthrop felt he knew. And instantaneously he came to the same conclusion as Frank had come to in his day-long tramp : the boy had far better go away, if he could be made to. No good could come of a situation of this kind. The least harm came if somebody went away.

His wife had shortly before made an angry descent on him, and his finger was still marking the supposed place in his book, for he had forgotten to take it away. Frank had been absent since breakfast : he had not bathed with the imps ; he had not been in to lunch or tea. And then Mr. Winthrop's finger dropped from his book, and he put it down. Frank had just appeared at the head of the steep, sandy path down to the beach, close to, and directly opposite, his father's seat, who was perfectly ready to talk to him. He had a glance at Frank's unguarded face before the latter saw him : it looked desperately miserable.

“ Hullo, father !” said the boy, and he vaulted over the railing that separated the cliff-path from the garden, and came and sat down by him.

“ And where have you been all day ?” asked Mr. Winthrop.

“ Oh, I went for a walk—a long walk — all along the beach. I went for miles.”

“ Take lunch with you ?” asked his father.

“ No.”

Frank pulled himself together, and tried to speak briskly and naturally.

"No, I didn't have any lunch," he said. "I'm sure one eats and drinks too much. I expect I shall eat an enormous dinner."

"That is quite possible—I mean that one eats too much. But I am afraid I have got used to it. You must have had a tremendous big walk, if you have been on the move since breakfast."

"Yes."

Frank lit a cigarette, smoked in silence a few moments, and then threw it away.

"I think I shall be leaving here soon," he said abruptly.

That was sufficient. It was unnecessary to ask any more general questions: his father could get straight to the point now.

"What's the matter, my dear boy?" he asked.

That longing for human sympathy and that aching trouble of bearing things alone, however secret they are, throbbed and stirred in Frank. He had been bearing it alone all day: he was weary with the burden of solitude. And his father was so human, so kind and quiet. Whether he could tell him or not, he did not know. But he felt that he could try to.

"Everything seems to have gone wrong this year," he said. "I thought I was going to have such a good time down here, and somehow it's all wrong. I don't mean you, and mother, and the imps, of course."

He stopped.

"Yes, old boy?" said his father.

Frank made a quick little jerk of his body and sat upright.

"I don't know what I've done wrong," he said, "but—but Lady Tenby and I—the young one, of course—used to be such friends. She was awfully nice to me

in London, and so she was at first down here. And then something happened. These last few days she has been avoiding me, or when we have met, she has treated me like a stranger. I would sooner go away than have things go on like this. I'm making a fool of myself, and if she would sooner not see me, for God's sake, let me take myself off. I've never been like this before."

Frank looked at his father a moment, as if wondering if he understood, wishing him to understand.

"I suppose you see what I mean, father," he said.

"Oh yes, yes. I am so sorry, Frank—so awfully sorry."

"I didn't know if you would be. At least, I thought you would. But you might have simply told me I was a bad lot. That sort of thing."

Mr. Winthrop considered this.

"Might I, indeed?" he said. "That would have been a great pity."

The reserve once broken, words came easily to Frank.

"I didn't mean to tell you," he said. "I meant just to say that I thought I had better go away. But then, as soon as I had said that, you seemed to know something was wrong. I don't know what I've done. I don't think she could have guessed. And she isn't cruel. If she had guessed I think she would have been sorry for me, like you, and kind to me. I would have been awfully happy like that. It was like that in London, when first I found that I was in love with her."

"And she suddenly began to—to treat you differently?" asked his father.

"Yes: down here. We parted the best of friends one morning after the bathe, and I went there to tea, and it was all changed. What do you make of it, father? I've worried and puzzled, but it's no use. It isn't as if she was changed to everybody. Only two days ago, she was building a sand-castle with the imps—shrieks

of laughter and all that. And then when I joined, she simply—simply dried up."

The further complication, the true one, had definitely entered Mr. Winthrop's mind. It was a pure surmise, but it seemed to cover the facts. That, if true, made it really important that Frank should go. For Frank's whole manner and attitude was utterly unlike the elate and merry incense-burner, ready for a hundred altars, and his father interpreted the difference correctly.

"Cut the whole thing," he said, with unusual energy. "I think your feeling that you had better go is quite right. She's another man's wife, and since you feel like that, you haven't got any business here. Why she ^{as} has changed in her manner to you needn't worry you. If you are wise, you are going to quit yourself of the whole business. You'll be better, too, away. I don't say you will instantly begin to enjoy things again, because that would be foolish. But you don't enjoy them here, as it is."

The sun had set, and the long line of crimson light across the sea had faded.

"You've got to pull yourself up, and fight," he said. "It is no good thinking that if she had been kind to you, you would have been content to go on as you were. You wouldn't : you would have been good for nothing. There's a lot of dangling after other men's wives in the world, and never did one pennyworth of good come of it. You can call it by a lot of fine-sounding names—chivalrous devotion and Platonic love, and a whole dictionary full of bunkum. But I for one don't respect those danglers. Let a man get a nice girl who will marry him, and let him stick to her, and not go mooning after other people's wives. I know it sounds easy for me to say this ; you're thinking that I'm a placid old man of over fifty, and you're a hot-blooded young man of less than half that age. But I'm right, even for twenty-five and under."

Mr. Winthrop was speaking with a heat and energy quite unusual to him. The long quiet hours of placid gazing at the sea had been productive of a great deal of thought.

"You've run after girls before, my dear Frank, and often you've thought that you were in earnest. But you haven't been, and you have more than half known it yourself at the time. But you know the difference now, don't you? You're in love with her, and you've got to go away and forget about it, because you are in love with her. That's what real men do, and you've got to be a real man. You've got lots of friends: go and pay a round of visits, and don't come back here. I'm glad that her manner to you lately has distressed and hurt you, if, owing to that, you have made up your mind to go away. It may be that she has seen that you are—well, getting too fond of her, and so, like a wise young woman, she lets you know that that sort of thing won't do at all. Miss Allenby was always a sensible girl. So go away: by the day after to-morrow you can have arranged something. And don't you bother to speak to your mother about it. I'll tell her you are going, and that I approve of your reasons, and that she is not to ask you anything about it. Let me know where you are and how you are; I shall miss you very much. And God bless you!"

They got up.

"Thanks awfully, father," said the boy.

Aunt Maggie had positively welcomed the idea of Chevely, and Violet, though she was secretly rather surprised that she was so willing to go, for she knew her attachment to High Beach, felt that her welcome of the plan was quite genuine: she even seemed to be relieved of some unuttered anxiety, and thought that they could manage to get off in a couple of days. Like Violet, also,

she thought it would be delightful to come back here later, say in October, when the place would be emptier of holiday-makers. August, moreover, was dreadfully hot and sultry, and—

She did not pursue that particular point, since she saw at once that there would be a slight failure of logic in the statement that it was so hot and sultry by the sea on the east coast that it was better to go inland, and took up the candle which she had brought to Violet's room when she came for a little talk on the way to bed. To-night the talk had been a very short one indeed : she had barely sat down.

" Well, dear Violet, I think I shall go to bed," she said, " though it's still early, for I have had rather a tiring, dusty journey. Let me see, Ted goes off early to-morrow, does he not, to Brancaster, and comes back next night ? "

" Yes, he will get two days there. Good-night, Aunt Maggie ; I am so glad the Chevely plan suits you."

" It will be delightful. You look a little tired, too, Violet."

" I am rather. I shall go to bed. There are just two notes I must write."

" Everybody been all as usual here ?" asked Aunt Maggie. " The imps, Mr. Frank ?"

She had asked this before.

" Oh, I think so," said Violet. " As I told you, I have seen nobody to-day except Ted."

How she wished that darling Aunt Maggie would go ! She wanted to be alone with all the strength of the instinct of those who have something secret and huge and tragic in their hearts. She was so little conscious of anything else that to-night she felt as if Aunt Maggie's loving, watchful eyes, behind which so much thought went on, must see it.

Aunt Maggie lit her candle, laughing.

"That is enough history for a happy woman," she said. "Good-night, my darling. I thank God you are so happy, you and Ted."

Suddenly it struck Violet, though dimly and remotely, as by a stroke through water, that Aunt Maggie was wondering if she was happy, rather than feeling assured of it. There was a tentative sound in her voice, as if she wanted a confirmation of what she had said. If Violet could not give her that—though she had not asked for it—she could give her something else, and that she did with a full and aching heart.

"I thank God for you too, dear Aunt Maggie," she said.

At last she was alone! She had longed to be alone, and at once the loneliness was intolerable. The comfort and luxury of her white room was a mockery to her, for the love with which she should have filled it had never really been there, the love which might have filled it could never come there. She thought with an incredulous wonder of the envy and admiration with which the world looked at her, thinking her prosperous and happy. Even Aunt Maggie thought her happy, and thanked God for it. Or had Aunt Maggie begun to wonder whether she was so happy?

The house was quite still. Ted, in view of his early start next day, had gone to bed an hour before, and she had already said good-bye to him. She was quite alone; nobody would interrupt the farewell which she had to make in her heart to another. She must say her farewell, the secret, real farewell, now at once. Then she must behave both outwardly and inwardly like a sensible, honourable being again. But this one moment of surrender and unfaithfulness she could not forgo. So for a minute she lay face downwards on her bed, quite

still, with eyes closed. No tears came : it was not a matter for tears : tears, like words, were superficial. She had just to open her heart, empty it, and close it again.

For some half hour afterwards she sat by her open window, crying quietly, for after that descent into herself she had to come to the surface again, and the tears lay there. And for the present there seemed nothing for her at all in this world. The peace of the star-sown night mocked her, but its mockery scarcely wounded her, for she was barely conscious of it. Yet even in that half-hour help did come, the self-help that is the immediate reward of any honest resolution. The way to hell may be paved with good resolutions, but it is only the cynics who do not know that the way leads through hell and out on the other side. . . .

Before she went to bed, she wrote one note :

“ Imps, darlings ! The poor barley-sugar lady has got to go away in a few days, and she is writing this just in the to-day-to-morrow time, and it’s Wednesday-Thursday. So she’ll come down to bathe with you this morning, and bring you back to lunch here, and play games till tea, unless the sweet-shop sends for her. Please tell your family I’m going away, and it can’t be helped.

“ VIOLET.”

She sat there after this was done, still pen in hand, until the ink had dried. Yes : she had to behave sensibly and reasonably. It was not sensible and reasonable to go like this without a word. And she wrote again.

“ And ask Mr. Frank to come and see me about sfx, just to say good-bye, if he isn’t busy.”

That would do. Aunt Maggie would be sure to be in

then. They would just have a little friendly chat. They had been friends : they were friends, she hoped.

All night a gentle breeze, cool, invigorating, salutary, poured in from across the plain of the unquiet sea, roughened by some remote storm, and breaking in sonorous thunder on the empty beaches ; all night the serene stars swung upon their courses, and yet all over this little star called earth, there was trouble, trouble. Even here in this peaceful seaside village there was trouble, with omen of worse to come. In the two houses sundered but by an acre or two of dozing trees and sleeping flowers, two lonely souls kept the watch of longing and impossible desire. But theirs was an innocent grief ; through no fault of theirs had it come to them. To them there was no hint of worse to come or better : there was nothing left for them except that which they had independently settled upon—to shake hands, to part. But beneath one of the roofs another watcher tossed and turned, afraid of the darkness, yet afraid of what the light might bring. She should have slept peacefully, for the weeks here by the sea, which she had feared, were so shortly to be brought to an end. Sometimes she slept a little troubled hour, sometimes she woke, but sleeping or waking, the sense of disaster haunted her. She could not reason herself out of it. And her trouble was not the innocent heartache of those on whom she had brought it.

CHAPTER XIV

VIOLET was sitting next afternoon in the deep veranda that faced the new wing of the house which she had built last year, and the hour was approaching six. She had had a rather tiring day, which had been spent in a final rampage with the imps, but she neither looked nor felt in the least fatigued. The sea had not gone down since last night, but a bathe at twelve had been possible. At least, it had been possible to sit on the shore and be suddenly whirled away with spread limbs like a starfish in the rush of the tumultuous swell. But there was no getting through the surf and out into unbroken water ; all that was possible was to be taken up and rolled away carpet-fashion or starfish-wise. She had chiefly been a carpet, the imps starfish. The children had lunched with her, and then, according to her promise, they had played every known game, and invented several unknown ones, till tea-time. Tea over, they had been fetched by their nurse, and quarrelled violently all the way home, from fatigue and depression at the thought of their friend's departure, which was manifestly unfair. Going in at their own gate, they met Frank going out. He declined politely their united offer to come back with him.

It still wanted a quarter of an hour to the time that Violet had appointed, but if she was engaged he would sit and wait for her, and he let himself in by the garden-gate he had used so often, up to these last few days, and walked across the noiseless grass towards the house.

To his right, at the end of the big herbaceous bed, of which old Lady Tenby was so justly proud, he saw her energetically at work, and half turned in her direction as if to join her. But he could say good-bye to her afterwards, and instead he walked on unseen by her. He did not mean to stop long; if Violet had not suggested his coming, he probably would not have come at all. And yet it was the reasonable and natural thing to go to say good-bye to her. Probably the imps had told her that he also was going next day. He wondered vaguely, without sense of personal interest, why she was going. She had enjoyed High Beach so much last year. So, for that matter, had he.

Lady Tenby had but just left Violet sitting in the veranda, to finish up a piece of planting she had been engaged on all the afternoon. It would take her not more than a quarter of an hour, and she would come back at six to see Frank after her gardening. It wanted, when she left, some twenty minutes to the hour. Morning had again quenched her fears by night, for Violet had been so completely and absolutely her normal self, indefatigably romping with the imps. The imps, also, had brought the news of Frank's departure next day on some silly visits. She was practically at the end of the dangerous zone; she had been afraid where no fear was, and, as she finished her planting, read herself a little lecture on the folly of imaginary fears.

So Violet sat in the veranda, not expecting him yet, when suddenly she heard his footfall on the crisp gravel, as he stepped off the grass, and recognized it. She had only got to behave naturally and in a friendly manner to him—that was necessary, for she could not leave with him that impression of herself which she had given him these last days—just for a quarter of an hour, and then

all effort would be over : the thing would have passed, leaving only its memories. Next moment he came round the corner of the house.

The chair in which she was sitting was very low, and she had to grasp its arms to help herself to her feet.

" Ah, Mr. Frank," she said, " how nice of you to come and see me to say good-bye ! It isn't six yet. All the better. You will stop the longer. Will you have tea ? I've had tea with the imps, but you shall have some."

" I had tea at home, thanks," said Frank.

As they shook hands they looked at each other for one moment, and saw something that surprised and startled. What was it ? Neither of them wholly guessed. But Frank, on whose thirsty heart her kindly greeting, given quietly and naturally but with sincere welcome once more, had fallen dew-like, forgot about that. A few seconds ago, it was almost with a sob of relief and eased pain that he had heard her loved voice speaking as a friend to a friend ; now that had been startled from his mind. There was something more in her eyes than in her voice.

But he had come here to say good-bye : only that. It was just for that she had sent for him. And she had gone back to the welcome and comradeship of the hours that had preceded these last nightmare days. Or so it seemed : her voice and her welcome were genuine. That was the utmost he hoped for. He had said to his father, with perfect truth, that mere kindness would have contented him, as far as content was possible.

" It's a double good-bye, isn't it ?" he said. " The imps tell me you are going, too. How funny that we should have both altered our plans in the same way, without consultation. Seems like a—what is it ?"

" Coincidence," said Violet.

" Yes : brain-wave is what I was going to say."

At any price, so Violet suddenly felt, there must not be silence. The most outrageous nonsense would answer the purpose, but there must be talking going on. Otherwise they might look at one another again. What was the opera where the two looked long at each other across the stage while the witchery of the love-philtre coursed through them? Yet this would not be the same: it was only she who had drunk. He, Frank, had not. He had drunk of the cup another held. . . . Any nonsense, any nonsense.

"Brain-wave?" she said. "That's where you think of a thing, and I guess it, isn't it? I take somebody's latch-key, you tell me what it is. There were some people who did it at a music-hall, and I remember I took from Ted a little locket I had given him. It had a bit of my hair in it, and the man at once said, 'Some of it belongs to a gentleman, and the rest to a lady.' Wasn't it funny?"

"Most remarkable," said Frank.

Surely it must be nearly six: surely Aunt Maggie would soon be here! It was almost as impossible to talk of the locket she had given Ted as to be silent. Yet she must not be silent. Why didn't Frank say more? His contribution to conversation was contemptible. Surely they could get through these two or three minutes till Aunt Maggie came without this awkwardness and embarrassment. She had never felt embarrassed—really embarrassed—with him before, not even when, a year ago, he had called her pretty. And yet all this fluttering thought was on the surface only. Deep below, deep below . . .

His chair grated on the pavement as he pulled it a shade away from her. The arm of it and of her chair were close together: she might pinch her finger between them. And perhaps it was another brain-wave that made her wish that he would speak, for the wish had no sooner occurred to her than he fulfilled it.

"I am so glad you asked me to come and say good-bye," he said, "otherwise I don't think I should have dared. I've felt all these last two or three days as if I had offended you somehow."

Violet's hand that lay on her chair suddenly gave a little involuntary jerk. Neither looked at the other.

"Offended me?" she said. "How could you think that? You are always as nice to me as you possibly can be."

Frank had himself in excellent control. He had no fear (and there was perfect justification for his sense of security) of betraying himself. He knew just what he meant to say, and it was nothing more than a friend had every right to say.

"That's all right, then," he said. "I thought that during these last few days——"

"Ah, don't rub it in, Mr. Frank," said she. "I've been quite horrid to everybody these last few days. I think I haven't been very well: it has been so hot. I couldn't play golf with you yesterday, I remember, because of the heat. But I feel all right to-day. Only, if I have been horrid to you, do say you forgive me. We're going away, you see, both of us. Of course, we shall meet again before long, but when one goes away——"

A moment before she had longed for Aunt Maggie^{*} to come and break up the difficulty of this interview which in anticipation had appeared so natural and easy: she wanted her to come with her solid, sensible personality, her everyday enjoyment of everyday things, to give balance, to make sense. . . . But now she longed for one minute more alone with Frank: she felt that she had to know he forgave her apparent want of cordiality, her brusqueness with him, her seeming dislike of his presence. She did not want him to understand the reason: there was nothing in the world that she wanted less than that. But there was

nothing that she could want more, since he was he, bound by his private obligation, and she was she, bound by the pledge of her name as wife, than she wanted his acceptance of her friendship, his renewal of their friendly intimacy. He had not been here five minutes yet, there was still ten minutes more before Aunt Maggie's arrival could be expected. She was sure to be here a few seconds after the stable clock at the Winthrops' just across the garden struck six, for she knew Frank was coming at six, and she was always punctual, however lacking others were in that virtue. But it was not six yet : there was time to be friends with Frank, and then welcome her coming. Violet would welcome it then, when things were straight between her and Frank.

She finished with a broken sentence : simply she could not complete it. He ought, so she wildly told herself, to have answered at once—said anything. She had shunned the meeting of their eyes before, but now she looked at him again, desperate at the passing of the seconds that made minutes, careless whether their eyes met or not. There could be no harm : she was bound ; so was he. That fact made the security for her.

He was not looking at her, nor, when she looked at him, did he turn. But his teeth held his lower lip, pressing on it, so that it was white. Then he turned his head a little, as if he was going to look at her, but stopped. And his tongue just stroked the lip he had bitten.

"Oh, but of course we shall meet again," he said.
"That's all right, Miss Allenby."

He did not smile at his mistake in her name. And for her it was August again, but August a year ago.

"Lady Tenby, I mean," he said, still quite simply.
"But somehow, everything went back. One forgets."

And then their eyes met again. Yet again he looked away.

"Last August was so jolly," he said, "and I suppose the fact that I'm saying good-bye again now takes me back to when I went away last year. You wouldn't let me write to you about the dogs and the ponies—do you remember?"

"Yes, I remember," said she.

"I was obedient, wasn't I? I never even wrote to you on your engagement. But, then, you never wrote to me about it."

Violet's only thought was to stifle that which cried within her. Her answer was, as far as intention went, the most obvious repartee.

"But you never told me about yours," she said.

The moment she had said it, she remembered that she had heard it in confidence. But Aunt Maggie, of all people in the world, would understand that it had slipped out accidentally. Aunt Maggie could not possibly mind so trivial a mistake. Then Frank looked at her quite straight, with nothing in his eyes except ordinary incredulous wonder.

"My engagement?" he asked.

Then he laughed.

"Do tell me about it," he said. "What do you mean?"

He looked straight at her now.

"Is it a joke?" he said. "Do explain."

"The girl you are engaged to," said Violet. "I suppose I ought not to have mentioned it. But last autumn Aunt Maggie told me: Lady Tenby."

Just a few minutes before she had thought of the scene in "Tristan und Isolde," where the two look at each other in silence. That had been inappropriate then, for it was she only, Isolde, who looked. Now both looked: her eyes met his.

"But there was never any such thing," he said. "How could she have told you that? What was the point? What did she mean?"

Was this nightmare or hell itself ? Violet went white to the lips. She knew the point, what it meant.

" You never wrote to her—Aunt Maggie, I mean ?" she asked, " telling her ? You wanted it kept secret from your father and mother. She told me all that. Oh, speak, Frank. And be quick : there is six striking ; she will be here in a minute."

Violet's hand and his had closed together, gripping closely, and neither of them knew it. It was but a symbol, external, trivial, of the life-force that was crushing them together.

" There was no word of truth in it," he said, with quivering mouth. " Don't you understand ? You must ! It was all a lie. As if there was anybody but you ! You mustn't mind my saying that. There's no harm. I'm going away to-morrow. I love you, you see. It's not my fault. Good God, I never meant to tell you. Never mind that lie. And I had better go, hadn't I ? I can't see Lady Tenby."

Violet's hand still held his. For the moment she, too, gave no thought to the lie. For this second Frank was hers.

" I suppose we are mad," she said.

" We ?" he whispered.

" Yes, we. Oh, Frank ! I thought you didn't care. I thought it was only I who cared——"

All else was forgotten. Ted, Lady Tenby, all, just for this one moment out of all the days and nights that had been stolen from them, that were rightfully theirs. And with arms tight clasped, their lips met.

It could not have been otherwise. It was but the stating of this huge debt that was owed them. But immediately after they stood apart again, except for the clasped hands. In them it seemed there was no power except to cling : they could not unclasp.

" You were mine then," said Frank.

" And you were mine," said she.

Across the lawn there came Lady Tenby, very hot and pleased with her planting. She would certainly have another cup of tea when Frank came. Or if he had had tea, she would have a lemon-squash or something. She had tucked the spade with which she had been digging under her arm, and, as she came round the bushes at the end of the long border and in sight of the veranda, she began taking off her gardening gloves. Clearly there was going to be a change in the weather, for the wind was rising, and the air smelled of rain. But that would do the garden good. Then, looking towards the veranda, she saw that Frank was already there. Violet was standing opposite him, and she quickened her pace a little, instinctively, simply because the two were alone together.

At this moment Violet looked round and saw her. She was still some fifty yards away.

" She is coming," she said to Frank.

" Yes. Are you going to tell her now?"

" I must."

" I will tell her instead of you," he said. " It will be dreadful for you!"

Violet heard Aunt Maggie's voice calling. She heard Frank's name, but that was all. Probably it was just a cheerful shouted greeting. And, in spite of everything, just because she was a woman, a kind of shame and compassion came over her. She was sorry for anyone who could have done this atrocious thing: Frank must not see Aunt Maggie's shame.

" Frank, go away this moment," she said, " without a word. I must do it alone. I can't bear you should be here. I will write to you, or see you—something."

Aunt Maggie was nearer now: her words were quite distinct.

"How are you, Mr. Frank?" she said. "And where have you been all day? I hear you also are going away. I ought to go and wash, but—"

Frank did not turn his head in her direction. Half a dozen crisp steps sounded on the gravel, and he vanished round the corner of the house.

She was quite close to the veranda now, where Violet stood looking at her. The moment of compassion had faded again now that she was face to face with the woman who had done this bitter wrong to her and her lover. And in her face Lady Tenby read what was coming. She was sure that Violet knew.

Once she tried to speak, and could not. At the second attempt the words came, but her voice sounded cracked and odd.

"Why has Mr. Frank gone?" she said. "Have you been quarrelling, Violet? I hope not."

Violet felt a sudden rage at the futility of this, at the insincerity so characteristic—oh, so characteristic!—of the speaker. The compassion was all gone now, and if Frank had still been there, she would have told him to wait and listen. Her face was like steel, her words as if they had been hammered and wrought on an anvil.

"No, we've not been quarrelling," she said. "We've been making it up. We love each other, do you understand? You've got to face it. Oh, Aunt Maggie! Wicked and cruel and false!"

Lady Tenby came into the veranda. Even at this moment she was afraid of servants hearing.

"What do you mean, Violet?" she said. "Are you, are you . . . ? For Heaven's sake don't talk like that. Come into the house at once."

In that moment the mere rage of Violet's passion had

blazed to its height and burned itself out. Had her hand flashed out then and struck Lady Tenby across the face, she would not have been surprised.

"No, I will say what I must say here and now," she said. "I don't want to make it long. You told me last autumn that Frank was engaged to be married. You pretended to have heard from him. You pretended to write back to him."

Even now Lady Tenby could not do the only thing that could have left her a shred of title to the respect of the most charitable and loving heart the world contained. Even now she could not admit the truth. And as she could not do that, she had to do the opposite, still lying, desperately, uselessly, almost pitifully. Once or twice before she had pictured in her imagination the scene that was now going on, and had known that she would lie again and yet again.

"What are you talking about, Violet?" she said. "You say I told you that Frank was engaged, that he had written to me? Preposterous!"

For a moment again a little compassion came back to Violet. This was so pathetically base.

"Oh, Aunt Maggie!" she said slowly, in a voice that was sorry.

Lady Tenby gained force a little.

"I never said anything of the sort," she said. "Have you been telling Frank so? You must retract that: it is some awful mistake of yours."

Violet just shrugged her shoulders. It was no use taking more notice of this. She need not even answer it.

"I don't want to heap reproaches on you," she said. "That could do no good. But you must go away at once, do you understand? You made me promise that I would tell you when I wanted you to go. It seemed to me a joke then: I think I laughed at it. I don't want

to make it worse for you than can be helped, but you and I cannot possibly remain under the same roof any more. You may make up any story you like for me to tell Ted, if you think that will be of any use. I am willing to keep the real reason from him if it is possible. Just tell me where you are supposed to have gone, and why. You are so good at making things up."

That flashed out without premeditation, and Violet paused a moment.

"I beg your pardon," she said. "There was no use in my saying that. No, don't interrupt me, please."

Violet was speaking quite quietly, and her thoughts, those, at any rate, which concerned matters like these superficial things, came to her quite clearly and precisely. Below, as she knew well, there were other regions—regions where dwelt tears and longings, and love, and rejection, and triumph. These would have to be seen to, when this was over. Pity was there too, pity perhaps even for Aunt Maggie, pity certainly for Ted.

But Lady Tenby broke in.

"I utterly refuse to go," she said. "It would mean that I admitted this monstrous thing. Go to Ted with your story, with what you allege against me, and I will go with my denial. Do you suppose——"

And then, poor soul! she remembered something more. She remembered having hinted to Ted before he had proposed to Violet that Frank could not stand in his way, that she had heard something which made it certain he could not be a rival. And she felt sure that Ted had understood.

Violet did not trouble to guess what it was in Aunt Maggie's mind that had made her stop so abruptly. Another plan, probably, another lie, in which her mind, always quick, had seen some weak point.

"It makes no difference," she said. "If you choose

to stop here, I will go. That is all. Then you can explain to Ted when he comes back to-morrow. I shall go to Chevely. You must not come there. I don't want to punish you, God knows. But you can't be with us any more. Now, which is it to be ? Am I to go, or are you ? I am perfectly indifferent."

Then for a moment Lady Tenby forgot herself, and thought only of Ted and Violet, of the misery which had come to those she loved through her.

"But what is to happen to you ? To Ted ?" she said.
"You told me you were not in love with Frank."

"I don't know what will happen," said Violet. "In any case, I could not discuss it with you. I can't discuss anything with you. Please answer me. Am I to go, or you ?"

Lady Tenby could not face Ted. She guessed that the truth could not be kept from him, for he in his relation of son and husband had to know. Yet . . . she felt that she could not tell him. Perhaps Violet might promise not to. She persuaded herself that it was for his sake that she did all she could to keep the truth from him, even as she had persuaded herself that it was for his sake that she had lied.

"I will go," she said. "Tell him——"

She pressed her hands to her forehead a moment.

"Tell him I have gone over to Paris for a week," she said. "He knew I was thinking of it. But, Violet, why tell him about this—this other thing at all ? Can't it be kept from him ?"

"I don't see how it can be," said Violet. "He must know that you and I have quarrelled——"

And then a thought occurred to her that gave her the sense of physical sickness. Lady Tenby had suggested a few seconds ago that they should both go to Ted with their story. What did that mean ? Did it mean that he knew already, that he had been privy to it ? She

could not, even in this storm and conflict of emotion, believe that of him. But an hour ago she could not have believed it of Aunt Maggie. And with that hideous suspicion in her mind, she spoke.

"Or does he know already?" she asked. "Did you and he concoct it together——"

At that the mother-love had for the moment complete possession of Lady Tenby. She spoke sincerely, spontaneously.

"Ah, no, no!" she cried. "He had nothing to do with it. You mustn't think that, Violet."

Violet believed her. Then, instantaneously, it flashed upon her what Lady Tenby's reply implied.

"He had nothing to do with it?" she repeated. "He had nothing to do with what?"

She paused: she saw Lady Tenby's face grow ashen. Futile and hopeless though her fight had been, up till now, at the least, she had been fighting, vehemently lying, doing anything sooner than confess the truth.

"I think you see what you have admitted," said Violet quietly. "But you did it by accident. Oh, if only you had done it on purpose, Aunt Maggie, even to-day! Even when it was too late! And now we won't talk any more. There is nothing more to say at all."

Lady Tenby suddenly put up her hands in front of her like a person groping in the dark, and came a few steps towards Violet. And then she fell on her knees, clasping the girl's ankles, her feet, questioning with hands of entreaty. And her voice rose to a wail.

"Oh, Violet!" she sobbed. "Is nothing possible? I am sorry. I know I am sorry. I thought you would be happy, you and Ted, and I wanted your happiness so much. You mustn't think I didn't love you, and that I don't love you. If I hadn't wanted you so much for Ted I couldn't have done it."

Violet felt herself shrinking from the pitiful cowering figure of the woman she had loved so, and who, so she still believed, loved her. But it was beyond her control not to shrink, even as the flesh cannot but shrink from the brand or the lash.

"Don't, don't!" she said. "It is no use—all no use."

"But can't you say you forgive me?" asked the wailing voice.

"No, I can't. Perhaps, if it was for myself alone, I might. I don't know. But there's Frank."

She withdrew herself, not roughly, but quite firmly.

"Oh, to be dead, to be dead!" wailed Lady Tenby.

"Yes, it is easy to wish that," said Violet.

And then once more something of compassion, something of pity, raised itself in her from that wild sea of bitterness, and longing, and love, a wave white-capped, iridescent. There groped and grovelled that splendid friend, in whose heart the joy of life beat to so swift a rhythm, she whom she had loved. . . .

"Aunt Maggie," she said—and her voice broke on the words—"you must try not to think me hard. I will try not to be. I shall never forget that we have loved each other, or the happy days that we have had together. And now you have done this!"

Violet paused a moment.

"I am sorry for you," she said, "for I know you are suffering. So are we all. We must bear it, and we must hope that some day we may find happiness again and peace. I can't say any more than that to you. Good-bye, Aunt Maggie."

Lady Tenby raised her face, tear-stained, distorted.

"Violet, Violet!" she cried. "My heart breaks! it breaks!"

A wretched quiver of smile broke out like a ray of

stormy sunshine on Violet's face, and she held her hands out.

"Poor Aunt Maggie!" she said. "I am sorry. There! Good-bye."

She took her hands for a moment, bent her head, and kissed her. Then she turned and went into the house.

Late that night Violet was sitting in her bedroom. Outside the wind howled, bugling round the corners of the house, and flinging itself like a solid thing against the windows. All evening it had increased in violence, and now the fury of the gale was unloosed. A great tattoo of rain drummed on the streaming panes, and the gutters choked and gurgled. But Violet heard nothing of it. Within her had another storm broken, and she hardly knew yet what shipwreck the night might not record. For the soul has to put out to sea, when the call comes, whatever menace of tempest and thunder of surf warn it; it may not wait for calmer weather, nor urge the prudence of staying in the safety of closed doors and sheltered windows. Into the dark or the riot of thunderstorm must it go, with savage lightnings that but show the wilderness of stormy weather which surrounds it. A hundred rocks are sown over its uncharted way, and faint and cloud-dimmed are the stars by which it must guide its course. It is alone at the rudder: none can help it or lend help with the sails that threaten now to tear the very masts out of the ship, and now hang idle, the wind of resolve spilt out of them.

For hours it had fared thus with Violet. Once, earlier in the evening, she had seized a sheet of paper and scribbled on it just two words to Frank, telling him to come to her now and here. She had addressed the envelope, even: in five minutes it could be in his hand, and in less than five more he would be with her, with

burning eyes, with lips responsive to hers, her own. Her marriage was based on quicksands, unstable and treacherous ; being built there, it could not stand. She had the moral right to repudiate it ; she had been tricked into it by false information, and at the moral bar she could not be held to what she had promised.

Yet she did not send the note. Long she sat with it in front of her, her mind wavering. There was the white bed on which she had lain but a couple of days ago, saying good-bye to him in her heart. But she did not know then ; she knew not that he loved her, and she did not know that she had been tricked. She would never have married Ted if she had known.

Ted . . . Ted must be told. It was no use her saying that Lady Tenby had gone to Paris. She was going to be in Paris or elsewhere always now : she would never live with them again ; Violet would never see her again. So it was better to tell Ted now, as soon as he came back. She would try the Paris excuse first, perhaps. But it would be no good. He would have to know that she had married him believing Frank to be engaged, knowing that he would guess more : he would very soon guess all. For why should the quarrel between his wife and his mother be irremediable unless the belief that Frank was engaged had meant something ? There was only one thing which could give it significance.

There lay the note in front of her, ready to go. . . . She wondered how Ted would take what she had to tell him. He would not rage and rave. Probably he would be very quiet. But what would he really feel, he in his inmost self ? He loved her—she knew that—in his quiet manner. How deep did that love go ? Was it knit into the very foundation of his soul, as hers was ? It might be : she did not really know. But she wanted nobody in this world, him least of all, to suffer and

struggle as she was suffering. She could spare him a little : she could spare him the sending of that note.

Darkness and storm and tempest ! Why not drive straight on to that rock so close to her now and be wrecked there ? It was nothing : only this frail little cockleshell of her soul would founder. There were plenty of other souls who sailed so safely across a calm sea, and never came near these perils, nor had anything but calm seas and favourable breezes. Paradise would be full enough without her : she did not want a golden crown and a crystal sea. God would not miss her, when there were so many to sing their hymns. Why not wreck her soul and be free ? It was so easily done. A little pressure of the bell-button—the note to be taken at once. That was all.

Ted ! There was still Ted. And there was still Frank. He would come to her : she knew he would care nothing about this drivel of soul-wrecking. And then a little light broke—there was a star somewhere shining clear in front of her, a star for steering. She loved him : if he cared nothing for this soul-drivel, she had therefore to care for his sake. She might wreck her own soul, if she pleased—not his.

Then she tore the note up.

Aunt Maggie ! It was all her falseness and lies that had led to this. She had made of this love, which would have been so human and so divine, a thing that was poisonous, a thing that must not be touched. Yet it was the same love. Either it was good or evil. Violet knew it could not be evil—as if Aunt Maggie could make that which Frank was to her an evil thing. So it must be good. She knew it was. And she was human and young. She had been cheated out of Frank. Frank had been cheated out of her. The note she had torn up would give them their rights, give love its rights. There

was only one word to be written. She had but to scribble "Come." That would be sufficient to undo the wrong done to her and him and love—that and the pressure on the bell-button.

Yet there was Ted—there was still Ted. He was innocent, anyhow: that fact had been betrayed at last, though it accused herself, by Aunt Maggie. Violet had been innocent too. Did she want him to suffer as she was suffering, by such righting of her own wrong? It would be bad enough for him in any case.

An hour had passed since then. Violet was utterly tired out, weary with struggle, weary with all that had passed, with the thought of all that was yet to come. But she had to do one thing before she went to bed. Perhaps, after she had done it, she might be able to sleep. It might take very long: she did not know. She was still sitting at the writing-table in the white bedroom, where so long ago she had written the note of two words, which she had torn up. Then she took another sheet of paper, and wrote:

"FRANK, MY DEAREST,—It is all so hopeless. Aunt Maggie has gone. It was very dreadful. You know I loved her. She loved me, too, and, oh, she must have loved Ted, or she could never have done anything so horrible. I know it is difficult to think that, but I am sure it is true. Try to think it, dear, won't you? You won't be able to think it at once. But it is so. I want to forgive her so much, and I mean to forgive her. But I can't quite yet. But it will help tremendously if you do.

"Frank dear, we *did* belong to each other for just that moment this afternoon. That moment was ours, and nobody can take it away. We have been cheated, but we mustn't cheat. And so we mustn't meet again. Either you must go away, as you planned, or I must.

So if your plans are made, will you go ? I have to tell Ted—yes, everything—and perhaps it is simpler if you go, given your plans are made. Ted must be told, I expect, why I wanted to go away. Anyhow, it is possible that I may have to tell him. So he will understand, if you have gone, why we need not go. But if for any reason that I don't see—and I feel so stupid and tired—it is better that you should stop, of course I will go to Chevely. But you and I mustn't be here together.

"Oh, my dear, it seems like this afternoon again, when I say that we mustn't meet, that one of us must go. I had to say that to Aunt Maggie. The same sort of words : we couldn't be together. But the difference ! I say that to you because—you know why I say it. I wonder if we can forgive her. I did my best. We must go on doing it.

"I hardly know what I write. I only know what lies behind it — love, and loyalty. We have been cruelly hurt, and we mustn't hurt other people, and we can't, just because we know now what it means to be hurt like that. I don't know how much I shall have to tell Ted — all probably. I can no more foresee what will happen than I could have foreseen what would happen when you came here this afternoon.

"Frank, please, please don't let me see you again. I ask you that in the name of our love. I dare say we have got to suffer long and be kind. It comes in the Bible somewhere. And here am I writing a letter of love to you, and still of loyalty to Ted. Indeed it is so. Half the world would call me a knave and the other half a fool. You won't call me either. You understand, don't you ? Of course you understand. I love you, you see, so you must understand.

"Good-night, my darling, and good-bye. It is all right, isn't it ?

"VIOLET TENBY."

She did not know whether this could be sent to-night. Probably it was late. And then she saw that the thin curtains over her windows were not lit entirely from inside the room. A little light filtered through them from outside. Dawn was already hinted at in the sky from which the wind still thundered and the rain poured, flooding the gutters and beating on the panes. Outside there was the same wildness and tumult, but here, in her white bedroom, it was calmer weather. The letter was written : the note was torn up.

CHAPTER XV

THE storm that had streamed all night at High Beach had been heavy also over Brancaster, and when next morning it showed no signs of abating, and it was seen that the links were sown with lakes and canals of standing water, Ted decided to go straight back home, since any further thought of golf to-day was out of the question. Starting by half-past eleven, he would get back there before lunch.

Violet had guessed that this might happen, and she was not surprised when he came into her sitting-room about one o'clock. All morning she had done the little household businesses which Aunt Maggie had been accustomed to perform so efficiently : she had seen the gardener, she had seen the cook, she had talked over the arrangements for their possible move to Chevely, for she had to see Ted also before countermanding them. After the struggle of last night, she felt numbed and torpid : her spirit was tired out, though the superficial and mechanical part of her consciousness was quite alert, and she transacted the Martha-business with precision and despatch.

" Day fit to drown one," said Ted. " Golf out of the question, so I came home. All right, Violet ?"

" Yes : the storm kept me awake. It blew and rained terrifically all night."

" You look rather tired, dear."

Violet smiled at him as he leaned over her shoulder.

Her spirit, that had felt numbed and torpid all morning, was beginning to stir and rouse itself again. It would be wanted soon—this minute, maybe.

"Yes, dear, I am tired," she said.

"But that isn't like you," he said. "I can't have you tired. In town you used to go all day and all night, and be as fresh as possible for your ride next morning. However, you've promised to see the doctor as you pass through town."

"Oh, twenty if you like!" said Violet, with a sudden ungovernable impatience. She wished he would not lean over her like that.

He kissed her and straightened himself up.

"Well, I will just go and see mother," he said. "It will be lunch-time in a quarter of an hour, won't it?"

Violet felt her hands get cold. The spirit was shaking off its lethargy and calling back the blood to her heart.

"Aunt Maggie has left," she said. "I think she told you she was wanting a few days in Paris, so she went off yesterday afternoon."

She tried hard to speak quite naturally and lightly. Ted was halfway to the door, but she heard his rather heavy footstep pause.

"That is very sudden," he said. And in his voice she heard what she had never heard before, the uncertain ring of suspicion. But, hopeless though it all was, she was bound to do her best. Also, passionately, for her own sake and his, she longed to put off the moment. She felt so exhausted, so unfit for any more just now, while if he let suspicion grow in his own mind— No, that was no use; no amount of general suspicion could break the shock of a thing so unconjecturable as this. Violet gave a little nervous laugh.

"Aunt Maggie always makes up her mind in a minute," she said.

There was the morning paper on the table by her. Ted took it up and opened it. But after a few moments he put it down.

"I don't understand about this journey to Paris," he said.

"No, nor did I quite," said Violet.

"Then it was a surprise to you?" asked Ted.

"Yes, oh yes," said Violet.

Once more he took up the paper.

"And when is she coming back?" he asked.

"I don't know," said Violet. Bitterly in her heart she wished she had Aunt Maggie's inventiveness.

Ted did not reply for a long while. He turned the page in his paper, then turned back again.

"Have you had some disagreement with mother?" he asked. "It can be nothing else. I can't quite believe that she set off for Paris like this without there being anything further. Those things don't happen. Won't you tell me?"

"Tell you what?" asked Violet, still straw-clinging, though her reason told her it was utterly useless.

Again he did not reply for a moment.

"Violet, my dear, put down that book and listen to me," he said, in a tone of quiet authority. "There are just two people in the world who really concern me and my life. They are yourself first and then mother. Anything that concerns you two must concern me. Now, I can't accept the explanation that she has just gone quietly to Paris for no particular reason. If you can't tell me what it is, I must go to her. I've got to know."

"I don't believe she would tell you," said Violet.

"Then, my darling, you must," said he.

Somehow it was a tremendous relief to be spoken to like that. He told her so quietly what she had got to do that there was no bracing of herself for it necessary. She

obeyed because she had to obey. He was right, and what he told her to do was right.

"Yes, we—we disagreed," said Violet. "She and I can't live here together again. I don't see how we ever can. And now, will you leave it like that? I beg you to. It will do no good, your knowing. With all my heart I urge you to leave it there."

She was still doing her best. But, even as before, in her letter to Frank, she had foreseen that it must all come out, so she had no hope now.

He looked at her very gently and steadily, shaking his head.

"But I can't," he said. "You know yourself that it is not possible. I must know."

Violet laid her hand on his.

"I am going to tell you now," she said. "Ted, she did a very dreadful thing. She told me, when we were down here last year, during those foggy days, that Frank Winthrop was engaged to be married. It wasn't true: she invented it."

"Yes?" said he, wondering why Violet stopped. "She told me the same thing—at least, she implied it. I remember—"

"Ah, poor Aunt Maggie!" said Violet suddenly, and in that moment her compassion was purer and more unmixed than ever before.

And then Ted saw why Violet stopped, and knew that she had told him all.

"I see," he said.

Her hand still lay on his, and he laid his other hand on the top of it, pressing it gently.

"Oh, Violet, my dear!" he said. "It made a difference, you mean? You would not perhaps have married me if you had known?"

"Ted, Ted!" she said.

He had only seen the half yet, and his mind moved slowly on, correctly following the path. And there was something so noble and so simple about his quietness that Violet, as she looked at him, could bear it no longer, and, for the first time since Frank had come yesterday to her in the veranda, she broke into a passion of sobbing. She had not wept like that for herself, nor for Frank, nor for Aunt Maggie.

For a few minutes he let her weep her heart out, and waiting, he guessed the rest. After a little while he spoke again.

"Don't cry so dreadfully, my darling," he said. "It has not been your fault, nor mine. We must try not to think of what has been done, but make the best of what remains. But there is one thing more, only just one, and then I think you will have told me everything. You love him now, do you not, and he loves you? . . . There, there! It is all told now."

And at that moment one conviction came to him, perfectly clear and infallible. How he could accomplish it he did not know, but somehow or another he had to get out of the way. His position, his relation to Violet, was false: it was founded on a lie. It must be demolished as quickly as possible.

Then—it was only the matter of a moment to perceive that—all his heart turned to her again.

"You must try to bear with me, dear," he said. "I will be as little troublesome as I can. There's always the best or the worst to be made of anything. It is foolish to make the worst. Frank, too, poor chap! Damned bad luck, damned bad luck! Should like to shake hands with him. He's a straight fellow: I always liked him."

She raised her head at this; the sobs had subsided now.

"Yes, yes, he's straight," she said. "Oh, Ted!"

thank you for feeling like that. He has gone, though. He went this morning."

He smiled at her.

"That's right, dear," he said. "I can't bear to see you cry. Now, some time we must talk over what's best. Oh, Violet, poor mother!"

Violet's mouth quivered again at this.

"I know, and I was horrid to her. But I did the best I could."

"Why, of course you did. You were such pals. Now, dear, it's lunch-time. We've got to have lunch just the same. What rain, too! It seems to get worse. And the wind! There'll be a terrific sea."

She had not really known till now what the power of mere honesty and simplicity was. She had shrunk from and dreaded his return, and she had dreaded, almost as much as she dreaded the interview she had just been through with him, the hours and the days that would follow. She had thought that she could bear the burden of her married life alone, but not with him there. That was largely for his sake: he must suffer so, and she did not want him to suffer. But already his quiet acceptance of what had happened, his acceptance, too, of the present irremediable situation, was soothing and healing. There was nothing unnatural about his naturalness; and it was not because he did not care that he took it so quietly. It was because he was kindly and simple. He talked exactly as usual: told her about his game yesterday, feared that they would not get out this afternoon in this torrential gale, hoped that all the fisher-boats had come in before it began. Only when they had drunk their coffee and were leaving the dining-room did he say anything that bore on that nightmare of tragedy, and then quite simply and sensibly.

" You are absolutely worn out, dear," he said. " I ask you to go up to your room and lie down till tea-time. We mustn't have you knocked up. You must really try to rest. It's worth trying."

There was strength behind his quietness, now that there was need for strength, and, thankful for being told what to do, even in so small a thing, she obeyed him, and went upstairs, thinking to herself that it was no use attempting to rest, but merely willing to do what he told her. But she was utterly exhausted, and she had scarcely lain down on her bed before she slept.

Ted went to the smoking-room. After lunch he always had a cigar, and he went to his cabinet now and took one. Then he sat down in his big arm-chair and began to think.

He had to get out of the way, and that as speedily as possible. Should he leave her, should he . . . should he give her the opportunity of getting a divorce ? That was the first idea that occurred to him. But there ought to be some better way than that. It was wretched for the woman, however blameless. It would be a hideous position for Violet. And she almost certainly would guess his motive. Their must be some better way than that. But they had to be separated entirely, he and she. She must be perfectly free.

Ted drew a long breath. It was curious how the simplest thing so seldom occurred to one first. Death. That was the way out, through the great door out of which the crowd ceaselessly passed into the dimness. . . .

But death did not always come because a man wished for it. He was strong and healthy, with years, probably, of life yet in front of him. Death would not heed his beckoning, if he only beckoned. So he must go to seek it. It was always within reach, if you went to it.

But there was another thing to consider. The thing must be done in such a way that Violet could never suspect he had voluntarily sought it. It must be something, an accident, an overdose, that seemed entirely unpremeditated. How could it be managed?

Outside the bedlam of the storm raged and shrieked. Below it at intervals he could hear great pedal notes, the thunder of the stupendous surf. But here in his room it was quiet. Upstairs Violet was fast asleep.

Till he should think of some plan that would answer his purpose, he must behave normally and cheerfully. That was of the first importance. She must not be able—afterwards—to think that he had seemed bothered, or depressed, or unsettled. There must be nothing to put her on the track, nothing in his manner that could suggest he was meditating any such thing. This evening, no doubt, they would have a talk: he must be full of quiet hopes that she would gradually recover from this shock. And for the future? Well, they must wait and see. There was healing in the mere process of time; there were such things as patience, and fortitude, and resignation. He must make it appear that he contemplated years of life, years from which by degrees sting and bitterness would fade. There was much to be said also for change and travel. Perhaps she would like to travel. He would, of course, come with her if she liked, or very possibly she might prefer to go with some friend. . . .

And then, because he was so human, and because he loved Violet, the bitterness of it all drowned him in deep waters. Of his mother, and of that which she had done, he could not at first bring himself to think: the thing which led to the necessity which now existed for him had been so cruel. Yet she was not cruel in nature. It was for him mainly that she had done it. Bitter thanks he owed her.

But what an awful hour she must have spent yesterday with Violet, and what awful hours since then, alone! That it was her own fault could only make her suffering the more intolerable. She must be sorry now. So he could not but be sorry for her. They had always loved each other.

But how—how was he to do what had got to be done? Already it seemed a problem over which he had been puzzling for months past. Did he fear death? Yes, a little. But it was an evil incomparably less than living.

Two mornings later Ted was returning along the edge of the cliff from his round of golf. They had abandoned the plan of going to Chevely, and here, in all external affairs, their life had gone on absolutely as usual. Both he and Violet recognized that it was much better that it should be so: the hours had to pass, and anything that would make them pass was friendly. They had had one talk together on the evening of the day of storm, when he had arrived from Brancaster, but after that no word further on these subjects. Perhaps they would go abroad soon: nothing was settled. He had counselled patience: she had acquiesced. From then until this moment he had not ceased thinking how to do what he must do and what he longed to do. As yet he could think of nothing.

He had come opposite the garden-gate on the narrow path at the cliff's edge, and stood there looking out over the exultant sea. He had stood just there with Violet not many evenings before, when she had proposed going to Chevely, for reasons which he now knew. There was a poppy or something she had pointed to, hoping it would get its flowering over before there was a further fall of cliff. She had also told him not to go too near the edge. There the poppy was, in any case, about a

yard from the edge, full-flowered now, brilliantly vivid against the splendid azure of the sea. The morning was glorious and windless, the sky washed clean, for again last night the heavy rain had fallen, all through the darkness of the long wakeful hours.

Then, as he looked at the poppy, he saw it shake and tremble and rustle, though no breath of wind stirred. To the right and left of it, through the bare yellow earth ran a sudden crack, as if it had been torn. It was for that sort of thing that Ted had been looking. Now that he saw it he recognized at once that it was this he had been searching for.

He stepped forward, two steps only, and stood between the poppy and the cliff's edge. It was quite sheer : it even overhung a little. Below the tide was not yet at its highest ; there was a belt of shingle that it would cover before it ebbed again. And he heard himself say quietly :

“ Now, be steady a moment—keep still. Not more than a mashie-shot down. Don't be frightened.”

But he was scarcely in need of encouragement. It was so good to find what he had vainly looked for.

The ground on which he stood quivered and shook. Then the whole lump turned over in a compact piece, and he was shot outwards and forwards, like a diver.

“ Free !” he said aloud.

A second fall of loosened cliff followed, and a third. There was no path left for a distance of twenty yards, and the railings of the garden hung crookedly and partly suspended in air on the extreme edge. Below no belt of shingle was visible now : tons of earth and sand covered it. Soon the sea lapped the edge of the fall, and grew discoloured and milky. But a little way out it kept its incomparable sapphire, sunlit, peaceful after the storm. . . .

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